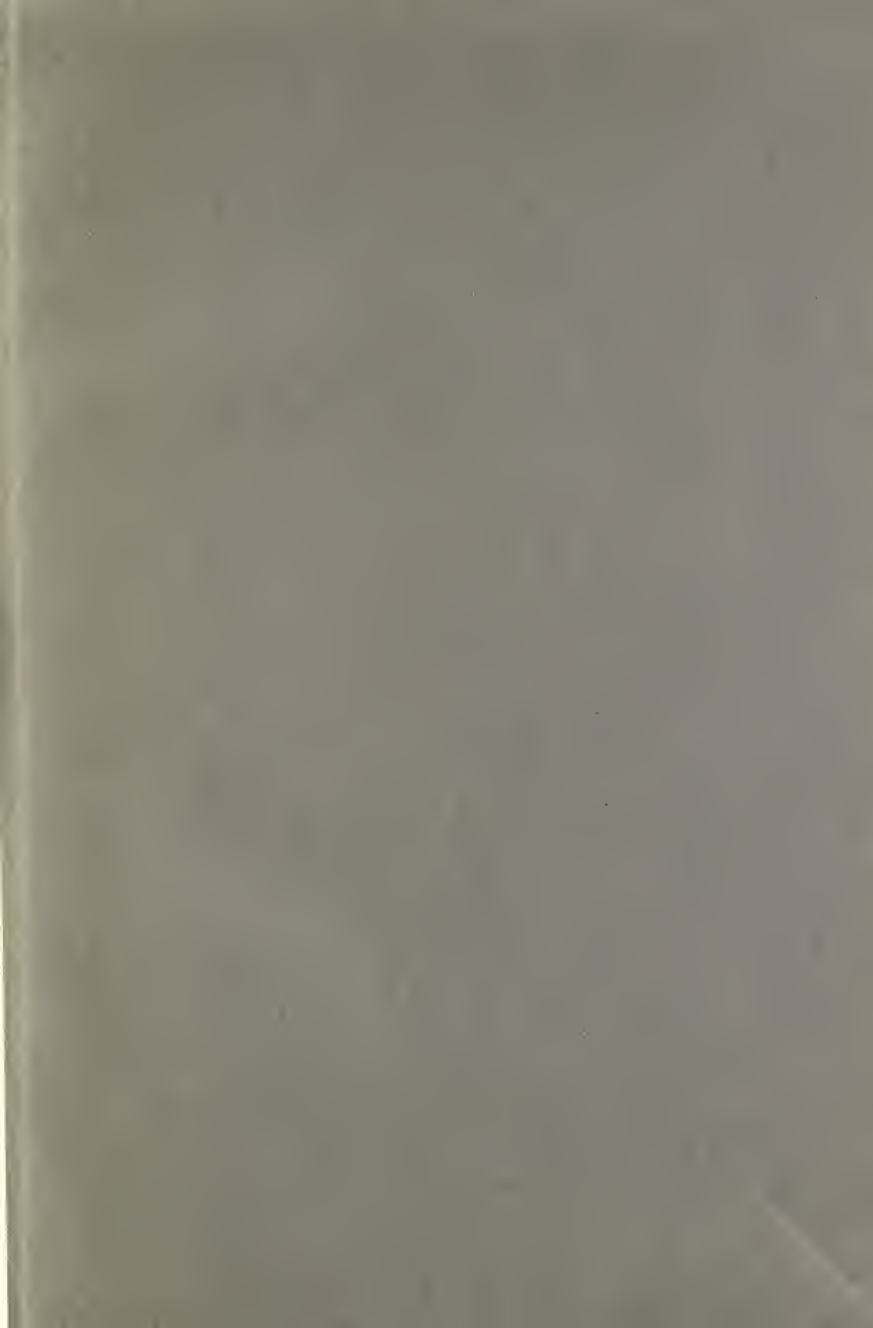


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ISABEL PROCTOR

IN THE SHADOW OF THE PINES

A Tale of

TIDEWATER VIRGINIA

BY

JOHN HAMILTON HOWARD

"And should the twilight darken into night,
And sorrow grow to anguish, be thou strong ;
Thou art in God, and nothing can go wrong
Which a fresh life-impulse cannot set right."

—George MacDonald



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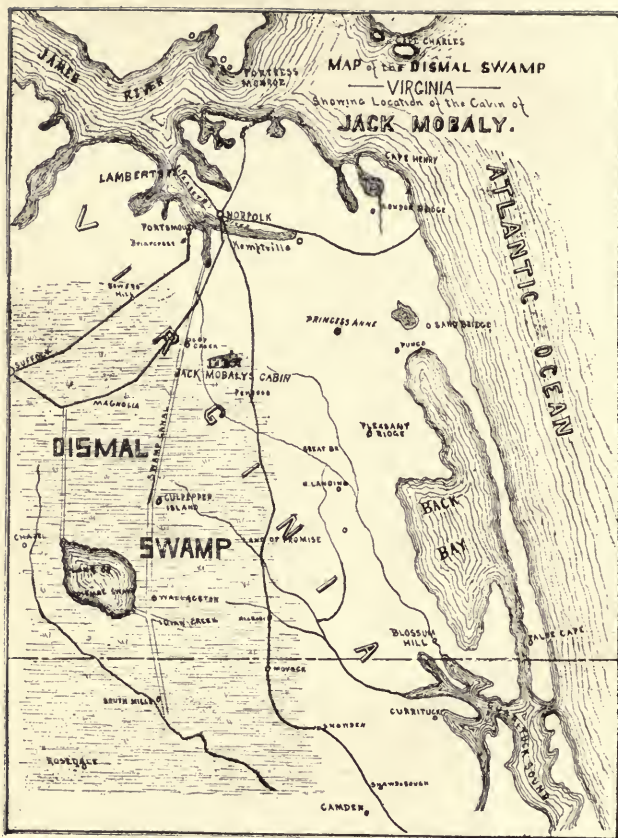
TO MY FATHER

WHOSE UNTIRING LOVE AND DEVOTION TO MY VENERATED
MOTHER—AN INVALID FOR MANY YEARS—
WERE UNBOUNDED;

TO MY MOTHER

WHOSE PROLONGED SUFFERING WAS BORNE WITH CHRISTIAN
FORTITUDE

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED



MAP OF DISMAL SWAMP REGION OF TIDEWATER VIRGINIA

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IN THE SHADOW OF THE PINES

IN THE SHADOW OF THE PINES.

PROLOGUE

TIMES and places are made conspicuous by events and personalities. Dates are given significance by the measure of the effect upon humanity of what they represent. The village of Deep Creek would not have such conspicuous mention here, were it not for an event or two, and several personalities. The events are not of unusual importance, nor are the persons exceptionally notable, but for the purpose of this work they are essential.

The characters who excite the greatest interest are not residents of the little village, and Dr. Demster, himself, is not a native. The old physician had a more profound reason than the practice of his profession, or his business interests, for spending his time in this small place. But few ever knew his motive.

The location of Deep Creek lends much interest to the place. It is crowded up against the Great Dismal Swamp, and this forbids the hope by even the most sanguine that the village will ever become a town. If they forgot themselves and indulged a hope, it was dispelled by a sight of the great swamp which shuts the place in on three sides.

PROLOGUE

Dismal Swamp has created an interest for Deep Creek which it otherwise would never have had. This region covers a part of six counties of Virginia and North Carolina, and is unlike any other region of similar size on the American continent. So great is its extent, and so impenetrable is this vast jungle, that it has never been explored. There is a canal, which bears its name, extending through the swamp, equidistant from its eastern and western borders, with a feeder connecting it with Lake Drummond, but from the depths of Dismal Swamp no one has ever returned.

There are well-authenticated accounts of travelers and hunters who have entered there for exploration and sport, but none returned to tell of his adventure. Many of them, misguided by the deceptive Jack-o'-lantern, have lost their way and wandered into the depths of the swamp, believing it to be a light from the window of some swamp-settler's cabin. From time immemorial the place has been infested with all kinds of wild animals common to this latitude of North America. The bear, deer, fox, panther, catamount, wild cattle, wild dog, many varieties of smaller animals and all kinds of native snakes and reptiles flourish within its murky borders.

Here and there, too, were the cabins of the absconding slaves. Thousands of negroes, in order to escape the lash of brutal masters, found their refuge in this vast jungle, and reared their families in the freedom of swamp life. When a negro disappeared, and it was known he had penetrated into the

IN THE SHADOW OF THE PINES

swamp, hope of his capture was abandoned. He was beyond the reach of the "Fugitive Slave Law," and the hounds which had been unleashed to run him down were recalled.

In connection with the absconding slave, two antagonistic interests conflicted. One was in the person and position of the patrol; the other was embodied in the shingle-getters. The patrol, or "pat-terole," as he was commonly called in the South, was an officer of the law, whose duty it was to pursue and apprehend the "runaway," and deliver him to his master, dead or alive. The contracting shingle-getters encouraged the "runaways," and underwent great risk in protecting them.

Culpepper Island, a high tract of three hundred acres, difficult of access, under the management of one Stephen Crane, was a favorite rendezvous for deserting slaves and white criminals. This refuge was maintained for many years, and was a prosperous place of its kind, until a posse of slaveholders made their way into the swamp, and routed the proprietor and destroyed his profitable business. Since the raid, Culpepper Island has been deserted as a residence, though the dwellers in the swamp make their way to it in search of game.

Deep Creek is on the line of travel from the eastern counties of North Carolina to the market places of Norfolk and Portsmouth in Virginia. The arrival of the Carolinians on their way to the markets was an event for this village, as it became not only a place of recuperation for the horses, but it was converted into a place of entertainment and ca-

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rousal. It not infrequently happened that a typical North Carolina caravan halted here on its way to market loaded with scuppernongs, chickens, ducks, eggs, et cetera. With the caravan were men in fustian and women in homespun, who stopped for a good time before attending market next day. Upon any of these occasions the village was lively late into the night, and frequently the carousal lasted until morning.

Three doors from the Dismal Swamp canal, near the point where the Deep Creek road breaks abruptly into the village, stands Audierne Tavern. Audierne was for many years a place of stirring interest. Stories are told of tragic events that occurred behind its closed doors. The elders of the village entertained their guests by relating the queer and wicked things that had happened in the old tavern, and believed the place was haunted by the ghosts of men and women murdered there in the days long gone by. At all events, it was a fact that blood stains were upon the floor for many long years.

CHAPTER I

LEAVING HOME

THE DARWOODS were an old Virginia family. They not only traced their lineage back to the early days of the colony, but also claimed that a distinguished representative of their name and blood was among the first settlers at Jamestown, and had performed conspicuous service in the formation of the colonial government. Members of the family had always been familiarly associated with noted Virginians, and closely identified with the fortunes of the Old Dominion from the remotest period to the eventful days which began at Fort Sumter. Few of them had ever gone from the state. They were clan-nish, and believed that there were no people so suited to their taste as those with whom they had been intimately connected—the Virginians.

Richard, the grandfather of Thomas Darwood, who was now the head of the family, had found his way down the James River to Tidewater, and had made his home in Portsmouth, on the Elizabeth River. It was in the days of the colony that Richard went to Portsmouth, and there for three generations this branch of the family had lived and prospered.

Thomas Darwood's property, entailed from his father, Samuel, was situated in the extreme north

end of the town, not far from where the Elizabeth makes a sweeping bend into the land, and forms what for a century had been known as Magothy Bay. On the maps of this section of Tidewater, as made from the old surveys, the bay reminds one of the hump of a great dromedary. The house stood in the center of a lot of more than ordinary size. It was of the Dutch style of architecture, rather low, and spread out over a large area of ground, with an old-fashioned chimney at each end, built against the outside of the house.

Many items of interest were told of the mansion (as it was called in other days) among which was the fact that all the material used in its construction, as well as the inside furnishing, was brought from across the sea; and that in the spacious parlor Washington and LaFayette had held many of their conferences, out of which plans developed the overthrow of British power in America.

Now, in the very room where the General and the Marquis had discussed and planned for independence, Thomas Darwood and his son Leonidas debated the selfsame subject, but with a different application. In the one case a nation was involved, in the other the individual only. Thomas Darwood was not willing that Leonidas should exercise independence of thought and action even when such freedom in no sense interfered with the privilege and comfort of any one else.

"Will you be gone from this house? And the sooner you go the better I shall like it," said Thomas Darwood in an angry tone.

"Yes; let me get what I claim as mine and I will get out of your way."

"The sooner it is gotten together, and you are from under this roof, the more contented I shall be."

"Don't worry longer, father. I'll soon be gone. The sun will set shortly, and I must find shelter to-night, but where, I do not know. I trust you will not be unhappy when I am gone."

"You have been disobeying my orders, and no one may remain in this house, and disregard what I command. If you persist in your foolish fanaticism, and continue to embarrass me and all the family, remember you are not to darken that door again until you obey me. And do not forget that when my will is written your name shall be left out. Hitherto you have been obedient and respectful, and your liberty in this house has been unquestioned, but now you seem bent on this course which I positively forbid. Do you promise that my wishes shall be respected? Think well before you speak, as much depends upon your decision. Do you promise, Leonidas?"

"It is true that much depends upon it—indeed, I think everything depends upon what I now do. This is surely a crisis in my life."

"Then do you here and now promise to respect my wishes?"

"I do not, and what is more, I cannot," answered the son.

The father was excited and bitter. The son was deliberate, calm and loving; and though he was

precise and determined in every word, there was the kindest consideration for his father. There are times in life when it is necessary to do contrary to the will of those whom we hold most dear. Such a time had come in the life of Leonidas Darwood. He was about to leave home, and the patriarch of old who heard the summons of God, the obedience of which involved the apparent sacrifice of the Son of Promise, did not hear the Divine command more distinctly than did Leonidas Darwood. When he heard it, he was ready to obey—to go out not knowing whither he was to go. And though he went with a sad heart, he was brave and confident in the possession of an enlightened and controlling conscience. He knew he had done no wrong, and when he had refused his father's request, he felt there was nothing to condemn him, and everything to approve.

To Leonidas Darwood his conscience was not a convenient thing to be used in the changing events of life, but a real, uncompromising governor, which often forced him into the acceptance of unpleasant conditions, as well as the refusal of conditions that would bring aggrañdizement and ease. He was now ready to render obedience to this force, and to face the issues of life as they came. He realized that he might not find in his wanderings a place so comfortable as his home had been, that the way of life might be rough, and that he might be called to endure privation and suffering to the last degree; but his decision was unconditional.

“Did I understand you, Leonidas, or am I being

deceived by my own ears?" asked the father, looking at his son in great surprise, while his face reddened with anger. "Tell me: am I mistaken? Do you really intend to leave home rather than obey my commands?"

"Father, I am sure you understand me," answered the young man. "I mean just what I have said, and my purpose is fixed. I shall leave home and never enter it again except upon your invitation. From this day and hour I shall not consider it my home, since I cannot enjoy freedom of opinion and freedom of conduct, when my opinions and conduct are in harmony with the right."

"Have you thought carefully of the step you are about to take?" asked the father, grinding his teeth tightly together.

"I have," replied Leonidas, "and my decision is final unless you reconsider yours."

"That I will never do," cried Mr. Darwood, and his face became scarlet. "You shall reverse your opinion on this social question, and cut the acquaintance of that Proctor girl, or leave this house never to return. You know it is embarrassing to me, considering the social standing of the Darwoods, to have you associate with a girl who is recognized as a servant of such a man as old Gabriel Arnold."

Thomas Darwood paused, becoming more and more enraged as he thought of Isabel Proctor as a prospective daughter-in-law. Taking Leonidas by the arm and striking one foot upon the floor, he screamed aloud: "The Proctor girl and all the Arnold tribe must be abandoned, or you must go."

Which will you do?" Then grinding his teeth again, and shaking his fist in his son's face, he said, "Remember, sir, I mean just what I say."

"Father," replied Leonidas, kindly, "I trust I am not displaying a spirit of disrespect, but my determination is as fixed as yours. You have created the conditions upon which I may remain at home. They are conditions with which I cannot comply, and save my self-respect."

"Self-respect!" roared the father. "You sacrifice your self-respect by leaving home on account of the low tribe you are bent on associating with, and by entertaining such absurd opinions concerning society. Do you know who this Proctor girl is, and do you have any idea of the kind of man Gabriel Arnold has shown himself to be?"

"I do not know Mr. Arnold very well," answered Leonidas. "I have seen him a few times, and I confess that personally I am not attracted to him; but so far as Miss Isabel Proctor is concerned, I have never heard the first word of reproach uttered against her, and I am sure her conduct has always been commendable whenever it has been my pleasure to meet her."

"Don't call a servant girl's conduct 'commendable' in my presence!" cried Thomas Darwood, with the energy of a man on fire with rage. "I will not suffer such indignity. I repeat it. Don't talk about the 'commendable' conduct of a servant girl. Nor will I permit you to say that it was a pleasure to meet her."

"Discussion is useless, it seems, father," said

the young man, kindly. "The matter is fixed. You have created the conditions. I cannot, and will not comply with them. I will go, and go now, and——"

"Then you are determined?" interrupted the father, still hoping to convince his son. "You mean to be a friend of the Proctor girl. Do you mean to marry her?"

"I do not know what the future has in store for either Miss Proctor or me," replied Leonidas, "but if our lots are cast together, the fact that Isabel Proctor is poor and dependent shall be no bar to any legitimate relation that may arise between us."

"Do you mean that you would love and marry such a poor thing?" insisted the father. "I ask again, is this your meaning?"

"I mean that her poverty would not prevent it," replied Leonidas. "When I leave home I shall be as poor as she, and will be compelled to make my way in the world. Father, I would rather love and marry a poor girl of unquestioned character than trust my fortune with the richest woman in Tidewater Virginia, if she were without the sterling quality of virtue that goes to make a noble character."

"Then you mean to leave home on account of a servant girl," said the father in derision. "You mean to go; do you?"

"I mean to go, father," said Leonidas, "but it is not on account of any woman that I have come to this decision. If it were any other girl in question than Miss Proctor, or any other family than Gabriel Arnold's, my decision would be the same. I

simply do not believe in the strictures you place upon the class of people they seem to represent."

"But Gabriel Arnold is not only poor," said the father. "He is a man that should be ignored. At one time he possessed considerable wealth, and because of his prodigality he has squandered his means."

"What became of his wealth?" asked Leonidas.

"He has lived a very depraved life," answered Mr. Darwood. "He has been a chicken-fighter and a horse-racer, and has done all the mean things imaginable by which he has gotten rid of his money, and now he is as poor as a church mouse."

"It is too bad if Mr. Arnold has lost his fortune by wicked or questionable means," said Leonidas, "but if he were poor, simply, I should not think the less of him on account of his poverty. It surely is no disgrace to be poor, and it should be no reflection on Isabel Proctor to be the niece of Mr. Arnold because he has lost his money."

"But do you know there is a grave suspicion concerning him, lately?" asked the father. "Nobody knows just what the trouble is, but those who have been intimate at the home of Gabriel Arnold are shaking their heads and talking in an undertone. Of course, I do not know, nor does anyone else, but I should take no chances in becoming allied to a family of which this man is the head."

"Of course, father," observed Leonidas, after a pause, "I do not know—indeed, I have not the faintest idea as to what your insinuation implies, but if the extreme suspicion that rests upon Mr. Arnold

should be well founded I do not see how it should affect his niece. Any rule of society that discounts a person because of poverty, or because of undesirable family, when the individual is pure in character and otherwise worthy, is cruel, and I shall never be influenced by it."

"You, then, mean to associate with Isabel Proctor, no matter what she or her uncle proves to be?" demanded Mr. Darwood, in a rage.

"I mean that I shall not be influenced by what he proves to be," said Leonidas, "and if there is no good reason to be found in Miss Proctor's own character why I should shun her, I shall treat her as courteously as if she were a member of the wealthiest family in Tidewater."

"Then you are blindly in love with the hussy, and do not care for consequences," said the father, quickly. "Are you stark mad?"

"Stark mad, father? no!" exclaimed Leonidas, "I am in my right mind, but I do not see the matter as it presents itself to you. Never a word of love has passed between Miss Proctor and me. We are friends, only."

This statement seemed to surprise the father. There was a pause in the conversation, and a manifestation of some embarrassment on the part of Mr. Darwood. His face changed color, his elbow slipped from the mantel and his arm hung limp at his side. It was a moment before either spoke.

"Then, then," said the father, slowly, but with determined emphasis, "why can't you promise to have nothing more to do with her?"

"I do not promise," said Leonidas, "because your position is unjust and cruel."

"But suppose her uncle proves to be a criminal?" said the father. "There are grave suspicions concerning him, as I have told you before."

"It may be," said Leonidas, "that I shall be as desirous as you are to avoid Mr. Arnold, but there may not be the slightest reason why I should desire to turn my back upon his niece."

It was now evident to Thomas Darwood that reasons other than those already employed must be advanced in order to change the young man's views concerning Isabel Proctor. He believed his son knew more of her than he was willing to admit. Indeed, he thought there was an intimacy between them that was almost certain to grow; and, unless something were done to prevent it, he had no doubt that Leonidas would marry the girl. This intention he proposed to thwart at whatever cost.

"Leonidas, listen to me," said the father, sharply, feeling that at last he had devised an argument that would cause the young man to dismiss Isabel Proctor from his thought. "Do you know who this girl is?"

"Yes, father," said Leonidas, "she, as you know, is Mr. Arnold's niece. Her parents are dead, and I know there are reasons for believing that she is not treated kindly by her uncle."

"I thought you did not know the mystery connected with this girl's life," said the elder Darwood, "or I am sure you would not become intimate with her, and when you know it, I shall be surprised if

you do not discard her at once, and despise her name."

"What is the mystery?" asked Leonidas, not a little surprised. "I have not heard it. Does it affect her personal character?"

"I am not sure that it does affect her personal character," admitted the father, reluctantly, "but it makes her unfit for the association of any one bearing the Darwood name."

"I will hear it, father. What is it?" asked Leonidas, showing signs of anxiety. "Does it affect her good name?"

"It is not certain that the Proctor girl is the niece of Gabriel Arnold, as she is believed to be," said Mr. Darwood, contemptuously. "She is regarded as his niece, and I have referred to her as such, but at the same time, I knew of the doubt. Her parentage is in question, and no one knows certainly who she is. Of course, she lived with the Proctor people, but they were as much in doubt as to her identity as anyone else. There has been a great deal of speculation about the girl's antecedents. You know if there were not something to conceal, more would be known about her. The question about her birth and parentage constantly arising, places a stigma upon her name, and because of this, she can never be admitted to respectable society. Then, besides, well, well—"

There was a break in the relation of the story, and the father paused to observe the impression made on Leonidas's mind. The young man was deeply affected, but his purpose was in no sense

changed by the implied mystery, although he felt anxious to know more of Isabel's history. He wondered if there were a chapter in her life that was dark enough to make it necessary to conceal it from the public, and he tried to push the inquiry further.

"Father, do you mean that Isabel Proctor is not pure? Has she ever done anything that any woman of the best Virginia family might not do? This is what concerns me. I am not so anxious to inquire into the parentage or birth of people, as I am to know what they are in themselves. Tell me, is Isabel Proctor of questionable character? Is she disgraced by anything for which she is responsible?"

"No, but the mystery, the mystery of her—her—birth and parents!" stammered the father. "The Proctors themselves could not explain the mystery about her."

"How did the Proctor people come by her?" asked Leonidas, with a tone of sadness in his voice.

"Well," replied Mr. Darwood, impulsively, shaking his head, "as in many another case. The family into which the brat was born paid some old hag to dispose of her, and she was left at the door of the Proctor people with the hope that they would take care of her. They took the child in and did their best for her as long as they lived. Since their death she has made her home with Gabriel Arnold, and believes him to be her uncle, for she never knew any other parents but the Proctors."

"Strange, strange," said Leonidas, in an undertone.

"Strange enough," returned the father, sharply.

"What about the girl? What do you propose to do?"

"Is it not more important to know what people are than to know who they are?" asked Leonidas. "I would rather know that Miss Proctor is a young woman of strong, pure character, than to be told that she is of royal parentage."

"I will hear no more of this nonsense," said Mr. Darwood, greatly indignant. "Say nothing to me about sympathizing with people of questionable origin."

For the first time Leonidas lost his composure, and his excitement was manifest in his reply.

"If this story be true, Miss Proctor deserves our sympathy and not our censure. I cannot see that anything you have said should affect her in the least. She is poor, and the circumstances of her birth may be peculiar, but since she is a girl of pure character and has always borne a good reputation there is no reason in anything you have said for dishonoring her. I certainly shall not do it."

Mr. Darwood stood motionless for a moment meditating upon what Leonidas had said. He thought he grasped his son's meaning. Moving quickly to where the young man stood he placed his hand on his shoulder and demanded:

"Leonidas Darwood, do you mean that you would marry the hussy, and bring her into the Darwood family, and disgrace our name forever?"

"Father," said Leonidas with more composure, "I have no thought of marriage yet, nor am I in love; but there is nothing you have related about

Isabel Proctor that would influence my affections; and when the time comes for me to marry, the fact that she is poor, or that there is a mystery connected with her birth, would have nothing to do with determining her fitness to become my wife. I should not consider, either, the fact that I am a Darwood, and that our family is of high social standing."

"Then you will have her in spite of my protest?" said the father, sharply.

"If it should turn out that I love the girl, yes, sir," replied Leonidas, quickly; "and nothing you have said against her would in the least influence my mind."

"Leonidas, Leonidas," said Mr. Darwood in a commanding tone of voice, "tell me why you persist in this fanaticism and disregard of social laws? Will you explain?"

Mrs. Darwood, who had been an eager listener to this conversation, now entered from an adjoining room and advanced timidly toward Leonidas. He moved to meet her, but the father sternly warned her to the other end of the room.

"Thomas," said she, gently.

The father turned angrily toward her, and Leonidas begged her to let them settle the matter as soon as possible.

"Not long since," resumed Leonidas, "I attended service in a church in Dinwiddie street—a church of the Methodist sect. It was my privilege and great pleasure to hear the Reverend Vernon Eskridge, an unpretentious man, discourse on the Beatitudes. While I may not be able to enter into the details of

the sermon, I have a vivid recollection of the man and the spirit he manifested, and much of what he said. Somehow, I could not then, and cannot now, escape the conviction that what he said was true. From the moment the preacher began his sermon his countenance was full of light, as if he believed with all his heart the interpretation he had placed upon the Beatitudes. I then and there determined, come what might, to accept that teaching and conform my life to it."

"What did the preacher say was the meaning of the Beatitudes?" asked Mr. Darwood, showing some interest in what his son had said.

"Well," said Leonidas, "he declared that Jesus, the Great Teacher, took a view of life different from that accepted by people generally. In the world the preferred classes are the rich and those who have had an easy time in life, and those who stand well in society; while in the Beatitudes, the preacher said, it was clear that Christ pronounced blessings on the very opposite of these. It was the poor in spirit, the mourners and the persecuted who excited the Great Teacher's sympathy, and upon whom he dispensed his favors. Father, this is a new idea in society, and it is revolutionary, but it impresses me as being the great need of the world, and I have determined to be a humble disciple of him whose purpose it was to give the oppressed a helping hand."

"Then it becomes a matter of religion," said Mr. Darwood, excitedly. "Of religion! You get it from the Bible, do you?"

His upper lip curled and his nostrils became distended.

"Yes," said Leonidas, kindly, "it is certainly the teaching of the Bible, and was exemplified in the life of Christ."

Thomas Darwood was nonplussed by the statement Leonidas had just made and the spirit he showed. He saw his son as he had never seen him before. In his heart he felt the young man to be sincere, but he was proud and stubborn and would not retract.

"Leonidas, my decision is final," said the father, resuming the spirit he had shown earlier. "You shall decide the matter now, once for all. This is your only opportunity. Stay without your religion and the servant girl or go with them."

"I will go," was the son's quiet response.

"Then go you must, and go at once," roared the father, striking his foot upon the floor.

Leonidas stepped to his mother. She was weeping. Putting his arms about her neck he kissed her upon one cheek, then upon the other, repeating the caresses again and again. He had voice to say, "Good-bye, mother. God bless you." Then turning to his father, he simply said, "I hope you will see it as I do some day."

"O, Thomas, what have you done?" sobbed Mrs. Darwood.

Leonidas was gone.

CHAPTER II

THE RESCUE OF EZRA

TOWARD evening, October 16, 1861, a company of traders from Carolina had gathered at Deep Creek. The villagers were all interest and excitement, for these occasional visitations meant noise for the entire night, and sometimes were fraught with more tangible consequences, as a broken limb, a bruised head, or a stab in the back was not uncommon. With a liberal supply of Dismal Swamp whiskey, the product of moonshiners, furnished at Audierne Tavern, no one was sagacious enough to guess all that might transpire.

Just after the market folk had crowded into the village, and before early candlelight, an itinerant bear trainer appeared. His bear was muzzled and a chain was attached to a strong strap about his neck. The trainer seemed to have absolute control of the animal, for commands were obeyed as readily as they were given. The bear stood upon his head against the tavern, waltzed to the music of a jew's-harp, and performed many other antics, which furnished entertainment for the Carolinians as well as the native denizens who had appeared at the advent of the trainer. There was nothing unusual in the appearance of the bear to interest the crowd now filling the streets, except that he was not of a species

common to Dismal Swamp. His color was not that of the ordinary black bear found in this vicinity; he was much larger in size, and displayed greater intelligence than his brothers of the swamp.

Against one of the posts which supported the dilapidated old shed in front of Audierne, holding the chain in one hand, and a long hickory staff in the other, stood the bear trainer. The performance had ended, and the bear was lying quietly upon the ground, with his head resting upon the right foot of his master. The crowd had dispersed, leaving only a few of the market folk lingering near the trainer and his animal. Among those still loitering about was the most ill-favored of the entire company, and it was easily perceived that he did not belong to the Carolinians. He did not wear the customary fustian, but was attired in a soiled red shirt, with the sleeves rolled up within an inch or two of his shoulders. The torn collar-band standing open exposed his breast halfway to the waist. His slouch hat had a broad brim, and the crown was battered in from the side. On his feet were unusually large rawhide boots, into which his coarse trousers were thrust. He held in his hand a leather whip.

Near him stood a well-dressed woman, looking around as if in search of some one. She had been present at the beginning of the performance, and had scanned, with a wild and anxious expression in her eyes, the men as they moved about. She excited some curiosity, but no one knew who she was. It was clear, too, that she was not one of the market

women. The rough man put his hand upon the woman's shoulder and pushed her aside as he took his position nearer the bear trainer.

Silently Jack Mobaly (for this was the man's name) stood erect for a moment, placed one foot before the other, drew his body back, and with a terrific lunge forward, cracked his great whip in the direction of the sleeping bear. His aim was accurate. The lash struck the bear in the eye. The animal immediately rolled over, tossed as if in great distress, then, springing to his feet, threw himself upon the trainer and instantly forced him to the ground. He stood with one paw upon the man's breast and with the other he scratched the earth, throwing the dirt upon the men standing near. He ran from his victim, but soon returned, swinging in a curious manner, and rolling his great head from side to side, apparently to keep time with the awkward movement of his body. He was thoroughly aroused, and seemed determined to tear his victim to pieces. With his paw again upon the man's body he tore his long garment into rags. The bear inflicted several wounds, one of which was over the left eye, running across the temple well into the hair, making a conspicuous gash. The blood flowed until it stood in a pool under the man's shoulders. Then, with one mighty stroke of his fore feet, the bear tore away the muzzle that had confined his mouth, and flung it, with the chain rattling, into the midst of the frightened men, who broke away from the scene. His mouth being released the bear planted his teeth in the fleshy part of the man's

body and, tasting blood, grew more infuriated. The victim, in his native "Yiddish," cried aloud:

"Gewald! Gewald! In Gots numen rahtivit mich."

Then the poor man said in a plaintive tone: "Schema Isroel! Adonai Elehenu! Adonai Echod!"

A young man carrying a satchel entered the village, as this cry fell upon the air, and hastened toward the commotion. As he quickened his pace, he heard more distinctly than before, though the voice was weaker, "Schema Isroel! Adonai Elehenu! Adonai Echod!"

He could not completely interpret the language of the sufferer, but it flashed upon him that "Schema Isroel" was the plaintive appeal of every Jew in sore distress. He had learned by his association with Jewish friends that these were the first words of the familiar sentence, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one." Which signified moments of extraordinary suffering and danger.

He reached the point where the only two streets of the village intersect. Turning the corner, he saw the crowd and pushed forward. The sight of a man flat on his back, with the teeth of a grizzly bear at his throat and blood upon the ground in every direction, confronted him.

"Gewald! Gewald! In Gots numen rahtivit mich," the man gasped, feebly.

The young man determined what should be done, and that it must be done quickly, if the Jew was to be saved from the mad animal. On the ground under the shed in front of the tavern, and not far



THE LAKE OF THE DISMAL SWAMP

from where the man and the bear were struggling, lay a cedar post. It was about six inches in diameter at one end, and tapered to a point at the other, with here and there upon it stumps of smaller limbs. This the young man perceived to be the best weapon available with which to attack the bear. He took the post and leaped forward, striking the animal with the sharp end.

His purpose was accomplished, for the bear became more furious and turned upon his assailant, running toward him with his mouth open dripping with the blood of the Jew. When the animal came with long strides, and with the characteristic movement of the body and head, the young man leveled the post and with all his strength launched it forward, striking the bear just over the eye that had been wounded by the whip. The animal staggered, but soon recovered and made another attempt to reach his assailant. The young man was ready for the next attack, and with gigantic strength struck the bear. This time the end of the post entered the animal's mouth, and ran several inches into its throat. Finally the bear was crowded into a corner at the end of the tavern steps, the young man forcing the post still farther into its throat.

"Take the man up. Take him up. I'll attend to the bear," shouted the young man, who, with the aid of one of the company, soon ended the life of the infuriated beast.

The bear trainer was borne away to a cot in the tavern, and when the door closed behind him a villager leaped upon a cart and shouted at the top of

his voice: "Fellows, this chap has done what we were afraid to try. Here go three cheers for Leonidas Darwood!"

The words were followed by hearty cheers from the few men who had remained to witness the finish of the fight.

In the meantime, Jack Mobaly, who caused all the trouble, slipped away unobserved, except by one or two, and made his way to an old grist mill.

When the animal lay dead Leonidas took his satchel and went into the tavern to make inquiry as to the condition of the injured man, who lay upon a rough cot in one corner of the room with his wounds still bleeding freely. His rescuer stepped lightly to his side and lifted his hand to feel the strength of his pulse. Before the young man had spoken a word the suffering Jew raised himself upon one elbow, and with the other hand supported himself in a half upright position, saying haltingly:

"Ich wil scharben für dir. Die hust gerahtin vit mein laben. Ich wil gehen für deer in feier und in waser."

The Yiddish was unintelligible to Leonidas, but by repeated efforts at imperfect English the Jew made him understand that he would go through fire and water for him, or that he would die to prove his gratitude for his rescue from the teeth of the bear.

Ezra was a native of Poland, and had been in America less than a year, traveling with his bear ever since he came. He loved Poland devotedly, and never would have forsaken the "Fatherland"

but for the trying conditions which obtained there. He had not done so until the last hope of Poland's independence had vanished. He had been conspicuously identified with Polish politics, had been exiled to Siberia, escaped, and came to America.

Ezra was a patriot, and the cause of his patriotism was to be found in the tradition of his family, as he believed it, and often related it. Early in the fourteenth century Casimir the Great occupied the throne of Poland. He had taken to himself a beautiful Jewish mistress, Esther by name, who bore him two sons and two daughters. The names of the sons were Niemertz and Pelka. Ezra claimed to trace his lineage back to Casimir through the house of Pelka, and had always seemed proud of his claim. Though he was assured by tradition that his progenitor, Pelka, was the son of illicit love, still he felt, in a sense, that he was a child of royalty. This conviction strengthened his love for Poland, and for Poland he would have died—if that would have freed her.

CHAPTER III

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

"MR. DARWOOD! Mr. Darwood, is that you?" came a sweet voice, apparently through the undergrowth, as Leonidas was making his way toward a house that stood in the center of Briarcrest, the estate of Gabriel Arnold. Leonidas was surprised, and paused for a moment to listen for a repetition of his name. He stood motionless for a time, looking about him and listening for any sound that might fall on the still night air. He was not mistaken, for he heard again, in a distinct voice, which this time could be recognized, "Mr. Darwood, is that you?"

"Yes," responded Leonidas, as Isabel Proctor wended her way down a footpath through the myrtle thicket to where he was standing, still looking about him to discover whence came the voice.

"What brings you here, Mr. Darwood, at this late hour of the night? Is it not unusual, particularly on such a night as this promises to be?" asked Isabel, as she stood trying to read his face through the darkness.

"It is a long story," said Leonidas, "and I cannot tell you now. But may I not ask why you are here? It is quite late, and a storm is approaching. It seems strange to meet you in this lonely place at night, and

especially this kind of a night. Why are you here? Are you out on some important errand?"

"Yes," replied Isabel, "I have been in search of a doctor. I was detained on the way home. I was just coming back by a nearer route through the myrtle thicket when I heard footsteps, and stopped to discover whose they might be."

"Who is ill?" asked Leonidas, fearing that sickness in Gabriel Arnold's home would make his entertainment for the night impossible.

"Uncle Gabriel is not well, and I am greatly concerned for him," responded Isabel. "Indeed I am alarmed at times. For some time past he has acted as if he might lose his mind. He has walked the floor, and has not wanted anybody near him. He has also talked to himself in an undertone, although I could never learn what he said. Now he has collapsed utterly. When I left, uncle was raving mad. I trust the doctor is with him and has pacified him by this time. I met Dr. Demster, the Deep Creek physician, and he consented to come. The doctor is a very-queer old man himself, but I was glad to get anyone in the emergency. This is my explanation. But will you not tell me why you are here?"

"I cannot tell you all now, Miss Proctor," replied Leonidas, as he took Isabel by the hands, and drew her nearer to where he stood looking into her eyes as the lightning played across the clouds in the west. "I cannot tell you now, Miss Proctor, but I am homeless and looking for a shelter to-night, and——"

"Homeless, Mr. Darwood! What do you mean?" cried Isabel in great surprise, before Leonidas could finish his statement. "Not homeless?"

"Yes, homeless," replied Leonidas. "My father has turned me out. I thought I might find shelter at your uncle's, but I suppose as he is in such a condition as you describe, this will be impossible. I was just making my way over there when I heard your voice, and stopped to be sure that it was you. I am glad I met you. Do you think it worth while for me to go farther?"

"I fear Uncle Gabriel will not receive you kindly," said Isabel, "but Uncle Zeke will, I am sure, and you must hurry there before the storm breaks. Zeke's cabin is not very inviting, but it will be a shelter from the storm; and, besides, you will be welcome. Tell him I sent you."

"Thank you for the suggestion," said Leonidas, "and when you are safe at home I shall find Uncle Zeke."

The two started through the myrtle toward Gabriel Arnold's house, Leonidas still holding Isabel's hand. The night was perfectly still, and not a sound could be heard save the occasional rumbling of distant thunder.

Breaking the silence, Isabel said:

"Mr. Darwood, you have not told me why you were ordered to leave home. Will you tell me now? I am sure you have done right, but I am very desirous to hear your story. I am sure you will tell me."

"In time you shall know all, and might know

now but for the lateness of the hour and the approaching storm," said Leonidas. "Wait until a more favorable opportunity, which I trust shall be soon."

They now emerged from the myrtle thicket into the main path that led to the house from the north side of the farm, and walked all the distance without speaking a word, both lost in thought, until they reached the veranda. Here they paused and Isabel asked again:

"Will you not tell me in a few words why you left home? Tell me this and I promise to be content until you have time to tell me all about it. Do tell me."

"On account of my religious convictions," said Leonidas, "and—and—"

"—And what else?" asked Isabel. insistently. "Do you fear to trust me?"

"And—and—you, Miss Proctor—and—and you," said Leonidas, with emotion, as he grasped her hand more tightly and drew her closer to his side. "Miss Proctor, my father is not pleased with you."

"How have I offended him?" asked the perplexed Isabel. "I have never seen your father, and how could I displease him? But I promised to be satisfied, and I shall say no more about it until we have a more favorable opportunity to talk."

The storm threatened every moment to break upon them. The leaves of the sycamores which stood about the house had been perfectly still during the evening, but now began to rustle as a pre-

monition of the coming gale. The lightning played in irregular, zigzag streaks across the clouds, now flashing so vividly near them as to dazzle their vision; and the thunder, that hitherto had rumbled in the distance, pealed forth like crashing artillery. Already the large drops of rain splattered in their faces, warning them that the storm was upon them.

"May I not see you in the morning, when all can be explained?" asked Leonidas.

"I shall meet you, Mr. Darwood," said Isabel, "but where?"

"In Uncle Zeke's cabin," responded Leonidas, assuming that the old slave would be at home and bid him welcome.

"You may expect me at nine," said Isabel, as she turned away to enter the house.

The storm broke with terrific fury, and Leonidas faced a blinding blast of wind and rain on his way to Uncle Zeke's cabin.

The clock, which for almost a century had stood in the hallway of the Arnold homestead, struck eleven as Isabel closed the door behind her. The old house reeled upon its foundation, and the windows rattled as if they would fly from their casings. Never before had Isabel known a storm like this. Never had she known the house to even tremble in the wind as it did now. As the gale increased in fury Isabel thought of Leonidas and wondered if by this time he had found Uncle Zeke, and if he were protected from the storm.

"If Uncle Zeke is not at home, what will Mr. Darwood do? I will be certain about it," said Isa-

bel, in a low tone of voice. Wrapping her uncle's coat about her shoulders, she plunged out into the storm, and was soon in the path Leonidas had taken.

Isabel made her way, through the darkness, to a place where the line of trees in front of the house terminated abruptly. An occasional flash of lightning enabled her to see where she was. Turning to the right, and walking a hundred yards or more, she saw distinctly the light shining through the boards that formed the shutters of the only window in Uncle Zeke's cabin. So delighted was she that she forgot the storm and forged her way ahead until she listened at the old slave's door and was satisfied that Leonidas was within. She turned to retrace her steps and in a few moments more came again to the great tree—the last of the row that formed a line in front of Gabriel Arnold's house. Just then, by the aid of a vivid flash of lightning, she saw to her surprise and alarm what appeared to be a man standing behind the tree, as if to hide and also to protect himself from the driving rain. Who it was she did not know. Her first thought was of Leonidas, and she wondered if, after all, it were he. But the next flash of lightning revealed clearly a man considerably larger than Leonidas, with long hair and whiskers and wearing a rough broad-brim hat.

Isabel had several times before seen a strange man at Briarcrest in close conversation with her Uncle Gabriel. He always came and went at night, in a way to excite her curiosity, but she had never

dared to make inquiry concerning him. He was rough in appearance, with shaggy beard and hair, and generally wore a soiled red shirt, with a leather belt from which hung a brace of pistols on each side. His trousers were crowded into heavy raw-hide boots, and he invariably carried a large whip such as is used in driving oxen in and about Dismal Swamp.

The man behind the tree in every particular resembled her Uncle Gabriel's stealthy visitor. He said nothing, but seemed to wish to conceal his presence. Isabel hastened homeward, looking behind her at every step. She reached the veranda and quickly entered the house, locking and bolting the door.

Throwing aside the storm coat, and satisfying herself that all was quiet in the house, Isabel crept lightly to her room. She retired, but did not sleep. The events of the night had been so unusual and exciting, and one experience had crowded so closely upon another, that she was wide awake. The storm was now at its height, but when she became somewhat accustomed to the rattling and banging caused by the wind, when the thunder had ceased, and it was possible to sleep, the vision of the man behind the tree came persistently before her with a reality that alarmed her. Then came the thought of Leonidas, too, and she wondered what he could have meant when he hesitated, and his voice trembled as he said: "On account of my religious convictions, and—and—you, Miss Proctor, and—and—you."

CHAPTER IV

GABRIEL ARNOLD'S NOCTURNAL VISITOR

AFTER midnight, upon hearing various noises, some of which could not have been caused by the storm, Isabel yielded to the impulse to move quietly about the house and ascertain their origin. She paused at the hall door which opened into her uncle's room, and was surprised at hearing a conversation in a low voice. It was impossible for her to see within, though the door was slightly ajar. She found that the rough man who had stood behind the tree when she went to Uncle Zeke's cabin had followed closely behind her and had entered the room through the window, as the outside door was locked and barred. More than ever was she convinced that he was the strange man whom she had often seen in close conversation with her uncle and concerning whom she dared not ask any questions.

Isabel listened, and became intensely interested, for she realized that the conversation concerned Leonidas and herself. She heard her uncle distinctly ask:

"Do I understand you to say a strange man went to Zeke's cabin?"

Isabel waited breathlessly for the answer, which was: "Yes, Gabe, a man went to Zeke's a short time before I came here. I was standing behind the big sycamore down at the turn of the lane, out

of the rain. When the lightning flashed I saw him leave your front door, and make his way down the lane by the trees, and saw him pound on old Zeke's door. Soon Zeke let him in out of the storm. In about ten minutes a woman came the same way. She went by me, and during a flash I saw her put her ear against Zeke's door. She then passed me again, and came back toward the house, and——"

The frightened girl staggered against the door, but was sufficiently composed to hear her uncle ask:

"Who in the thunder could the woman be?"

To this question came the emphatic response: "By my life, Gabe, I believe it was your niece, Isabel."

"And who could the man be?" asked Arnold with a gasp which indicated great consternation.

"I don't know, but I fell in with Hiram Hicks in the edge of the pine woods, as I was coming in, and he told of a fuss at old man Darwood's. He says young Darwood has become so contemptible of late that his father has driven him away from home. One of the reasons given was that old Darwood feared the young man was in love with that niece of yours. I wouldn't be much surprised, Gabe, if the fellow who went to Zeke's was young Darwood and the woman who followed was your niece. Now, don't it look that way?"

"As sure as you live it does," replied Arnold, with a sigh, "and Zeke and that youngster are up to some devilment, I'm afraid."

Isabel became more and more agitated at this

revelation, and her nerves were almost beyond control. She could scarcely resist the inclination to rush into her uncle's room. But her own welfare, as well as that of Leonidas, was involved, so she determined to be quiet in order to hear the conversation to the end. Standing in the center of the hallway, with her hand behind her, and grasping tightly with the other the ends of her shawl which met at her waist, she listened tensely to what followed:

"I don't like it a bit, to have that fellow prowling about. He is certainly here for no good. Besides, he might have seen you, too, and will let the cat out of the bag. What do you say about keeping an eye on the lad?"

"It would be all up with me if the police suspected that I came to Briarcrest. They think now that I went to Texas when I broke jail, and if they ever get an inkling of my whereabouts they'll be on the lookout for me. I'm afraid of the scamp, since you come to speak of the danger. I think we'd better take him in hand. But why are you so much afraid of him, Gabe?"

"If he's gone to Zeke's, I'm afraid he may get the negro's confidence, and in an unguarded moment the old fool may tell some of my business affairs. His going to Zeke's cabin, I fear, is a bad sign for me. I wish he were a thousand miles away. What can be done to silence him? For he's sure to have something to tell since he has seen you and has talked with Zeke. You may think me suspicious, but we had better look out for him."

"I don't think anyone could recognize me now, especially at night, when the only light is from a flash of lightning, but still I am not willing to take any chances. Something will have to be done with the lad. What will it be?"

"I don't know the most practical thing. What do you think about it?"

"Think about it? I'll think about it when the time comes. By the way, Gabe, why do you keep old Zeke about you, anyway? He is old and no good. You've sold all the other blacks that have not gone to the swamp. Why don't you let him go, too? I don't see that you have any use for such an old nuisance. I'm sure it ain't because you've too much conscience to sell the old man. Your conscience is like mine, if you ever had one. It is done up and laid away, never to worry you again; ain't that so, old pard? Come, what's the matter with you? I tell you, old fellow, you are getting white as a ghost. What are you looking at that door for? Do you hear anything? Come, now, nobody is there. Tell me why you keep Zeke."

"Well,—I—I—, well—I—I—"

"What's the matter with you? Why should a little chat about an old nigger shut off your talk like this? If he was mine, and I was in your place, I'd take him into the pine woods down by the sycamores, and I'd knock him in the head with that hickory club there in the corner; then I'd sink his old black carcass to the bottom of the branch. That would be the last of old Zeke, and I'd be happy over what I'd done. Or if you have too much con-

science for that, why don't you pay somebody to take him off your hands? Then he couldn't tell any of your affairs. I'd settle with him—I would. I'd get rid of him somehow."

"I've often wished I could—but I can't now."

"Blame it, take him to the pine woods and send him over."

"No, no; not in the pine woods."

"Why, that's a fine place for such a job."

"No, not in the pine woods. I can't. I've often thought of it, I say, but I can't, now."

"How long since?"

"Since the day—the day of the eclipse—the day that was so dark—dark in more ways than one."

"Gabe, old fellow, there's something crooked between you and that blame nigger. You needn't tell me what it is, but I know by the way you stammer and stutter, and by your scary look, there's something the matter. Don't tell me, but I know that old rascal's got something to tell the young man, and it scares you to think about it. Gabe, quit talking about Zeke. What do you want done about the young man?"

"I don't know just what, but somehow I want him out of my way at 'most any cost. I confess I'm afraid of him since you said he went to Zeke's cabin."

"By Jove, Gabe, did you hear that? It's four o'clock. I must be out of this."

Isabel heard the man leap quickly to the back window of Gabriel Arnold's room and slip out into the darkness. Her Uncle Gabriel dropped

upon his bed, greatly troubled with the possibilities suggested by the recent disclosures.

Meanwhile, Isabel's mind was in a state of strange agitation. She wondered what it all meant. It appeared that Uncle Zeke exerted a mysterious influence over her Uncle Gabriel, but the nature of that power she did not know. It had been of short duration—only since the day of the eclipse. What could have happened that day to change the whole current of her Uncle Gabriel's life, and give this slave such a hold on him? Why was he so afraid of Uncle Zeke? Then, too, there was an evident conspiracy between this strange man and her uncle. Leonidas had suddenly crossed their path and they immediately wished him evil. Was it true, as the strange man had intimated, that Uncle Zeke had something to tell Leonidas, which made it necessary for her Uncle Gabriel to hate him, and to wish to dispose of him at " 'most any cost?"

These questions crowded upon her excited brain until she became nearly frantic. She felt sure that her uncle would, with this mysterious man, plot against Leonidas; and that back of it all there was a motive which she must at least attempt to fathom.

As Isabel turned quickly, but silently, to go to her room, she was startled to hear her uncle leap from his bed and pace back and forth across the floor, muttering:

"The infernal wretch! If that young scamp gets my secret from Zeke, Tidewater Virginia will not hold both of us; that's sure. He'll go the way of the Count."

CHAPTER V

UNCLE ZEKE TELLS OF THE DARK DAY

"WHO's dat knockin' at dat doe?" shouted Uncle Zeke, in great surprise and alarm. "I'd lak ter know who's dat cumin' ter 'sturb ol' Zeke dis time o'night. I'd lak ter know who 'tis an' what da wants, anyway."

"Uncle Zeke, it is Leonidas Darwood. Can't you let me in to stay till morning?" asked Leonidas, in a bold, distinct voice, in order to be heard above the noise of the storm.

"La sakes, Mars Lonny, what yer doin' out hyar dis time o'night?" asked Zeke, as he flung the door wide open, even though the rain was driving toward it.

Leonidas, being now assured of the old slave's hospitality, pushed in quickly from the blinding tempest. Though the storm had been raging but a short time, he was thoroughly wet, and even his belongings in the satchel were soaked with the rain.

"Mars Lonny, set down dar on dat crickit, jam by dat fire an' dry yersef; an' den tell Zeke 'bout why yers out dis bad night. I wants ter hyar, chile, an' yer mus' tell ol' Zeke," said the negro, persuasively, as he showed Leonidas a rough, improvised seat which was placed near a small light-

wood fire in the great fireplace, used for light rather than heat.

The old slave, Ezekiel, sat upon a short pine log, while Leonidas, as invited, sat upon the cricket.

"Mars Lonny, I wants ter know jes why yers out dis kin' o'night?" persisted Uncle Zeke. "Don't yer hyar dat wind er blowin'? I feels sorry for yer ef yer had ter cum out hyar. Tell me, Mars Lonny; I wants ter know.

"Uncle Zeke," said Leonidas, as his lips trembled with emotion, "my father has sent me away from home."

"Yer don't mean dat, Mars Lonny, duz yer?" asked Zeke, feelingly. "Mars Darwood's allers bin kin' ter yer, hain't he, Mars Lonny?"

"Yes, father has always been kind before, and he is simply mistaken now," answered Leonidas, sadly.

"It's sprizin' ter me, Mars Lonny, sprizin' dat Mars Darwood driv' yer 'way frum home dout no-whars ter go 'ceps Zeke's cabin. Has yer bin doin' sumthin' bad, Mars Lonny?" ventured Zeke, with a note of apology in his voice.

"I don't think so, Uncle Zeke, but my father and I differ as to what is right and what is wrong. He thinks that I am wrong, and I say that I am right. We seem to be so far apart in our ideas that we can't remain under the same roof."

"So yers bin spattin' 'bout sumthin' wid Mars Darwood, an' he's dun sent yer 'way frum home. Is dat it?"

"No, Uncle Zeke, there was no quarrel. I simply could not agree with my father, but I tried to leave home with the best of feeling, and while I have a sad heart for some reasons, I, nevertheless, am happy. You seem not to understand how this can be."

"Happy, Mars Lonny, an' no whars ter go 'ceps ol' Zeke's shanty?¹ La, chile, I don't see how 'tis dat yer kin be happy."

"Well, Uncle Zeke," answered Leonidas, "your cabin doesn't leak, even though the storm is so fierce; besides, I'm sure I'm welcome, and that's a great deal. I can't stay long, I know, as Mr. Arnold might be displeased should he know I am here. So I'll get away as soon as I may."

"Yers welcum hyar, Mars Lonny, yes, yers welcum, an' yer kin stay jes as long as Mars Gabel Arnold don't know it. Mars Gabel am er mighty bad man. Yer don't know how bad Mars Gabel am; an' ef he knowd yer wus hyar, he'd be mighty mad an' s'picious, too. He's bin s'picious of folks lately, I tells yer, an' don't want nobody 'bout hyar. When anybody cums on de farm, Mars Gabel wants ter know dar bisness right soon, I jes tells yer."

"Doesn't he have anybody come to see him?" queried Leonidas, hoping to induce the negro to talk further of Arnold's life.

"I knows of but one man dat cums hyar now, Mars Lonny, an' he cums hyar nights, an' goes

¹The term "shanty," though of Irish origin, is used interchangeably with "cabin" by the negroes of the Dismal Swamp region of Virginia. This is probably to be accounted for by the fact that the Irish people were the first to find their way into the habitable places of the Great Swamp. They have left behind characteristic names for several localities, such as "Shillalah," "Ballahack," et cetera.

'way 'foe mornin.' Dat looks funny, now don't it, Mars Lonny, fur dat man ter cum hyar, an' go 'way 'foe daylight? He don't think Zeke eber sees him, nuther duz Mars Gabriel; but I has seed him, an' I tells yer, I's scyard er him."

"Why are you afraid of him, Uncle Zeke?"

"Kaise I don't know why he cums hyar nights," replied the old slave, and in his manner it was plain to see that he had a suspicion that the strange man, whoever he might be, meant no good in his visits to Briarcrest.

On his way to Uncle Zeke's cabin, in a flash of lightning, Leonidas had seen a man dodge quickly behind a tree. He could not describe him. He had merely seen the man, but he felt certain that the nocturnal visitor who had excited Uncle Zeke's suspicion and fear was no other than the man behind the tree. It would be unwise, he felt, to let Uncle Zeke know that he had seen a strange man, and probably the one to whom he referred. He was far more concerned to know something about Gabriel Arnold than the mysterious stranger, no matter how significant and suspicious this man's presence at Briarcrest might be. If Arnold objected to everyone except the stranger approaching him, this aloofness would certainly stand as a serious obstacle in the way of his own wish to enjoy the society of Isabel. Leonidas had no fear that it was the pleasure of Isabel's society which induced the midnight visits of the stranger, but he feared that Arnold might, upon the slightest provocation, or no provocation, look upon himself as an enemy.

From Isabel's anxiety while at the myrtle thicket, Leonidas knew there was a grave reason, at least to her mind, why he should not desire to come into contact with her uncle. What that reason was he did not know, but thought he might learn something from Uncle Zeke upon which to base a conjecture. Drawing his cricket nearer, laying his hand carelessly upon the old man's knee, and looking into his eyes, Leonidas attempted to lead Zeke's speech toward the relation of what he desired to know.

"Uncle Zeke, you said a moment ago that Mr. Arnold was a bad man. In what respect is he bad? You know a man may be very bad in some particulars, and fairly good in others. For example, he may be unkind to those about him, but at the same time be perfectly correct in his moral character and in the business world be counted honest, while, on the other hand, a man may be absolutely kind, unusually so, and he may be dishonest in his dealings. Bad temper and an evil disposition may be the result of bodily disorder, while dishonesty comes from a wicked moral nature. When a man is dishonest it is because he is bad at heart, but a man with simply an evil disposition sometimes deserves our sympathy. In what way is Mr. Arnold bad? Is he simply unkind to his slaves? It may be that some of them deserve all they get."

"Mars Gabel hain't got no slaves now, 'ceps me an' Dinah," said Zeke, beginning to show unusual interest in the conversation. His countenance changed, and his eyes snapped.

"What has become of his slaves?" pursued Leonidas. "He had a great many at one time, I'm told."

"Mars Gabel Arnold got so mean an' poe, dat da couldn't stay hyar," said Zeke, with much earnestness.

"Well, where——"

"But, hol' on, Mars Lonny, an' I's gwine fur ter tell yer 'bout it. Mars Gabel got so poe frum gamlin' on his game chickens, dat he had ter sell a nigger now an' den ter git some moe money. His chickens nebber wus so good as Mars John Gudbed's an' Mars Wash Buttin's. Da uster beat him bad, an' got er power o' money out'n Mars Gabel, I tells yer. Den he lose er power o' money bettin' on ol' Club Foot in de races. Mars Gabel uster bet an' brag on ol' Club Foot, but he nebber wus so fas' as Mars John Gudbed's leetle Sall. 'Twixt de chicken' fightin' an' de hoss racin', Mars Gabel's got mighty mean an' poe, I tells yer. So, Mars Lonny, he dun sol' de blacks ter de traders ter be tuck 'way down ter Alabam. Den he got so mean an' bad, an' beat de udder blacks so hard, dat dem dat wusn't sol' lef' Mars Gabel an' tuck ter de swamp—deed da did. De las' dat run away wus Pompey. He sot de dogs on poe ol' Pompey, an' da obertuck 'im an' kill 'im in de swamp. Ef he could er run er leetle funder, an' got ter Mars Crane's on Culpepper Islan', den de dogs couldn't cotch 'im. Mars Crane takes cyar ob de black folks, he duz. Mars Lonny, de islan' am de boss place fur de runaways. Now, Mars Lonny, 'twix dem da tuck ter Alabam, an'

dem dat tuck ter de swamp, da've all gone 'ceps me an' Dinah. An' Mars Gabel hain't gwine ter sell me an' Dinah. Yes, Mars Lonny, Mars Gabel dun sol' de blacks ter git money. Dat wus bad, now wusn't it? But Mars Gabel dun worse'n dat jes ter git er leetle money." This last was uttered by Zeke with a significant look and tone.

Leonidas seemed not to grasp the statement of the old man, so interested was he in the disappearance of the slaves and the manner of their going. Presently he spoke again:

"Then he is not so unkind to you and Aunt Dinah as he was to the other slaves, is he?"

"No surree!" replied Uncle Zeke, with much earnestness. "No surree, dat he hain't. Mars Gabel's er mighty bad man, but he hain't bad ter me an' Dinah no moe. He uster be, but he hain't now."

"There must be something good in Mr. Arnold after all, Uncle Zeke, or he would not be good to you and Aunt Dinah. If he were all bad he would have treated you just as he treated all the other slaves, and by this time you would have gone to the swamp. A person may be more bad than good, but there is something good in the worst man, and once in a while the good will show itself."

"Mars Lonny," said Zeke, shaking his head, "ef yer thinks ebrybody's good, yers gwine ter be mighty fooled. Dars lots ob bad folks in dis world, an' da'se got no good in um, nuther. Mars Gabel's one ob dat kin', an' I knows it. When yer knows 'im lak ol' Zeke, yer'll say right lak me, dat he's er mighty bad man. I knows Mars Gabel, I dus."

"But, Uncle Zeke, the fact that he is kind to you and Aunt Dinah shows good impulses."

"La sakes, Mars Lonny, yer don't know Mars Gabel Arnold," said Zeke, with animation in his voice, and with flashing eyes. "He's good ter me an' my ol' ooman, kaise he can't hep hissef. Zeke knows too much fur Mars Gabel. I knows right smart what he don't want me fur ter know, but I knows it, all de same, an'——"

Here the old man paused, as if he felt that he had said more than he intended. Recovering himself, after a moment of embarrassing silence, he said, "Yes surree, Mars Lonny, Mars Gabel uster 'buse me an' Dinah, but he don't do dat now."

"How long since he has changed toward you and Aunt Dinah, and why has he changed?" asked Leonidas. Seeing that Uncle Zeke became agitated by his question he continued: "Uncle Zeke, you also said that Mr. Arnold kept to himself more closely of late than he formerly did. How do you account for this change? If he has no company but the strange man who comes at night only, there must be a reason for it. Do you know what it is?"

The old man became more and more excited, but hesitated to speak. Leonidas realized that he was probing too deeply into a tender spot. The old slave arose and hobbled back and forth across the floor several times, then quickening his steps, he hurried to where Leonidas was sitting, before he spoke.

"Mars Lonny, Zeke knows all 'bout dat. I knows jes why Mars Gabel hain't mean ter me an' Di-

nah; an' I knows jes why he don't want folks ter cum ter see him, an' why he's so s'picious. But I don't know why dat strange man cums hyar nights. No, I don't know dat."

"Never mind the strange man," said Leonidas. "Tell me about this change in Mr. Arnold, and why it is so, and how long he has been so different."

"It's bin sence de 'Dark Day.' Now, don't ax me no moe," implored Zeke, showing greater nervousness than he had at any time before.

"What was the 'Dark Day,' Uncle Zeke?" persisted Leonidas. "Do you mean the day of the eclipse?"

"I don't know 'bout de 'clipse—what dat is," said Zeke, impressively, "but I knows dar wus er mighty dark day, when de chickins went ter roost in de broad daytime. Yes surree, da went ter roost in de daytime, an' de niggers got mighty pious an' scyard, an' wanted ter git 'ligion mighty bad. Sence dat day, Mars Lonny, Mars Gabel hain't beat me an' Dinah. Sence dat day, he's bin s'picious ob de folks dat cum hyar, an' now he don't hab nobody 'ceps dat strange man what I's bin tellin' yer 'bout, what allers cums hyar nights a lookin' round."

At this statement, Uncle Zeke's voice trembled with emotion, and his large frame shook from head to foot. He acted as though some terrible recollection was forcing itself upon his memory, in spite of his wish. He threw his hands up to his head, and dropped his covered face on young Darwood's knees. Between his sobs he cried, "Dat—'Dark—Day',—oh,—dat 'Dark--Day!' " Then, as if his

heart would break, he blurted out, "De—pine—woods, de—pine—woods!"

After a moment he arose quickly, took a large hickory cane standing in the corner near the fireplace, and with it staggered across the cabin floor. He opened the door as if to go out into the storm which was still raging, but Leonidas hurried to him and putting his arms around him, drew him back to the pine log seat.

Uncle Zeke sat for a time silently staring into the fire without seeing it. He was like a man in a stupor. At that moment he could think of nothing but the "Dark Day" and the tragedy then enacted, which, ever since, had burdened his life.

Leonidas put his hand on the old man's shoulder to attract his attention, and began: "Uncle Zeke, what—"

Before another word could be spoken, the old man recovered sufficiently to say protestingly: "No, Mars Lonny, don't ax me dat; but Mars Gabel Arnold's er mighty bad man. Mars Gabel Arnold's er mighty bad man."

CHAPTER VI

ZEKE MAKES A DISCOVERY

IT was now early morning, and the storm had almost spent itself. While it had been raging in all its fury, whistling through the crevices of the old cabin, and moaning in the tree tops, with now and then a great sycamore, falling heavily before the rush of some tremendous blast, the conversation had continued, except when an extraordinary gust of wind threatened the safety of the cabin. In the lull which followed Leonidas and Uncle Zeke ceased speaking—neither could have told why. They gazed at each other until the silence became oppressive. The storm had blown so long and furiously that they became accustomed to its sound. When quiet was restored it seemed unusual. They looked at each other with surprise.

There was a reason for their silence. It came with the quiet that followed the abatement of the storm. It was like the waking of the miller. While the mill runs naturally, and thunders with the noise of a cataract, the miller sleeps peacefully, but if the wheels slip a cog and there is any jostle in the machinery he is aroused from his slumber. Or if the great wheel ceases its revolutions, and the clatter of the mill gives place to silence, the miller is aroused. It is the silence now that awakens him.

It was the sound before. In either case, it was simply the unusual that disturbed his sleep.

Presently Leonidas asked, "Uncle Zeke, is Mr. Arnold kind to Miss Isabel?"

"No, Mars Lonny, dat he hain't. Dat man hain't kin' ter nobody 'ceps me an' Dinah."

"Is he unkind to her?" asked Leonidas, with strong feeling in his voice.

"Yes sur, Mars Lonny, dat man's mean ter her. But what yer know 'bout Missis Bel?" asked Zeke, glancing searchingly at his questioner.

"I have seen her several times," admitted Leonidas, "and I was greatly pleased with her; but she always looked sad to me, and I have often wondered if Mr. Arnold and his sister, Betty, were as kind to her as they might be."

"No, da hain't," responded the old man, warmly. "Tuther day, Mars Gabel tuck Missis Bel out'n ter de beech tree stump, an' don't yer know he wus gwine ter flog her right lak he uster de leetle blacks? I wus stanin' wid my back 'gin de big sicamoe, an' I couldn't stan' an' see dat gal treated dat way. Missis Bel's too good fur dat, fur she hadn't dun nuffin.' So I jes walks ter Mars Gabel, an' puts my han' on 'im, and sed, 'Mars Gabel, don't yer hit her wid dat whip, kaise she don't 'zarb it.' An' I tells yer, Mars Lonny, he didn't hit her den, an' he hain't hit her nebber sence when ol' Zeke wus 'round. He hain't furgot de 'Dark Day.'"

The recollection of the "Dark Day" caused the old man to stagger and fall back upon the pine stump.

"I have an interest in Miss Isabel, and it is partly on her account that I am away from home now," said Leonidas, as soon as Uncle Zeke had recovered his composure.

"What yer means by dat?" asked Uncle Zeke, eagerly. "What Missis Bel dun?"

"I want to tell you a story," said Leonidas. "I am sure you will be interested."

"Yes, indeedy, Mars Lonny, I wants ter hyar 'bout why yers away frum home, an' why yers in ol' Zeke's shanty. Go on, Mars Lonny. I's dyin' ter hyar."

"My father ordered me out of his house early yesterday evening, because of two things. One concerns my religious convictions, and the other concerns Isabel Proctor. My father does not believe in a God, or in the Bible; and I do. It made him violently angry when I told him that I had determined to live a Christian life. The particular point of disagreement between us has to do with the proper treatment of the different classes of society, and—"

"What yer means by dat, Mars Lonny?" interrupted Zeke.

"I mean simply this," replied the young man, "my father, because of his fortune and the high position of the Darwood family, thinks it right to make a great distinction between the rich and the poor. He thinks money and position in the world make some people better than others who have neither of these. Christ denied this distinction, and made all such questions a matter of religion. I have

come to believe that a man cannot be a Christian and live up to the requirements of the Sermon on the Mount if he holds such opinions. Christ pronounced blessings upon the poor in spirit, the mourners and those persecuted for righteousness' sake, and never said once that a man is any better because he is rich. Jesus never made any distinction on account of a man's riches, but always went to those who needed Him most. My father says I'm crazy, but the matter seems so important to me that I have resolved to live according to the teaching of Jesus as found in the Bible. My father objects very seriously to this."

"Why dus Mars Darwood 'ject ter dat?" asked Uncle Zeke.

"He knows it will lead me to associate with poor people, and he does not consider them worthy of a Darwood's attention. He is fond of speaking slightly of the 'poor white trash and negroes.' I have told him I consider this cruel. He claims to see a difference in my life since I became a convert to this doctrine, and becomes furious when it is mentioned. He declared that I should change my opinions or leave home, and I have left home, Uncle Zeke."

When Leonidas concluded this part of his story, he was curious to know its effect upon Uncle Zeke's mind, for he believed the old man would enter largely into the immediate events of his life, somehow or other, either for weal or woe, and form an important factor in the shaping of his destiny.

"Mars Lonny, yers dun egzackly right. De good

Book sez sumthin' 'bout us worshipin' de Lord under er vine an' fig tree widout folks darin' ter 'lest us. When yer couldn't sarb de Lord at home, fur de cussedness ob yer ol' dad, yer did egzackly right ter lebe 'im. But it'll be mighty bad fur ol' Mars Darwood when de good Lord gits hold'n him," said Zeke, not without a touch of satisfaction at the prospect.

"I'm glad you approve my decision, Uncle Zeke," said Leonidas, feeling that in the old negro he had a friend who could now be taken into his confidence and trusted implicitly with everything that concerned him or his future.

"Mars Lonny," remarked Uncle Zeke, with deliberation, "yer tol' me 'bout yer ligus 'victions, but yer hain't tol' me what yer dad's got 'gin Missis Bel. What dat gal hab ter do wid yer an' Mars Darwood? Dat's what I'd lak ter know."

"She had nothing whatever to do with that. She's as innocent as an angel, but my father imagines that there is an intimacy between us that might prove serious after a while."

"What yer means by dat, Mars Lonny?" asked Zeke.

"My father has seen me a few times with Miss Isabel. I have met her in different places. Once at the market place in Crawford Street in town. I was talking with her when my father came up. When I went home he said I was getting entirely too intimate with 'that Proctor girl.' He objected to my becoming intimate with her for several reasons. Since the death of her parents and her

coming to live with Mr. Arnold my father regards her as a servant, and positively forbids my associating with her. While there is nothing but friendship between Miss Isabel and me, I am acting upon principle, and rather than snub a true and virtuous young woman, simply because she is poor in this world's goods, I would share a similar lot and leave home forever. When quantity of money makes the only distinction between us I don't think it means much, after all. To my mind character is everything, and until I know to the contrary I shall treat Miss Isabel as she deserves to be treated. I told my father this, and he said I might take the servant girl and the Bible and go to the ends of the earth. Uncle Zeke, there's never been a word of love spoken between Miss Isabel and me, but since she has become the partial cause of my leaving home I feel a strange, new interest in her. And last night—I can't tell why—a strange feeling came over me. As we stood in the path near the myrtle thicket, and I held her hand—”

“La sakes, Mars Lonny,” interrupted the old man, rising as he spoke, “did yer see Missis Bel in all dat storm las' night?”

“I met her at the myrtle thicket, just before the storm. She had been looking for a doctor. I hadn't time to explain what I have told you, but I saw her safely to Mr. Arnold's door and the storm came upon me before I could make my way here. It was Miss Isabel who told me to come here, and that I would find a welcome; and, when I clasped her hand in mine, my heart throbbed faster. Until last night,

when I met her, all young women were the same to me. The fact that my father objected to her for the reasons he assigned created a sympathy and tenderness for her; but since I bade her good-bye at the veranda my feeling is more than sympathy, and it is not tenderness, simply. It is more. I can't explain it. I—I—fear—”

“La bless my ol' soul, Mars Lonny,” shouted the old negro, gleefully, “I knows what dat is! I knows egzackly what 'tis. Yer luvs Missis Bel, an' I knows it.”

“I am not so sure, Uncle Zeke,” replied young Darwood, smiling at the negro's delight, “whether it is love or not, but I am certain my interest in her is very great; and I have a desire to see her and to be with her all the time, which was not the case before. I am glad I left home on her account. Yes, I could die for her!”

Uncle Zeke made no comment upon this outburst, but went about preparing breakfast. When it was over, and a fresh log was laid upon the fire, Leonidas drew from his pocket the little gold watch his mother had pressed into his hand the evening before, and remarked, in an undertone:

“It's 'most time for her to be here, and I shall soon see her again.”

“What's dat, Mars Lonny?” asked Uncle Zeke, with surprise. “Is Missis Bel cumin' ter ol' Zeke's cabin? Did she say she wus cumin'? Ef she sed so, she'll be hyar—min' dat. An' she'll be hyar on de tick ob dat watch. She's er gal ob her word, she is.”

"Yes, Uncle Zeke; she's coming," answered Leonidas, recalling every word and movement of Isabel as she bade him good night and whispered, lest some one might hear, "You may expect me at nine."

CHAPTER VII

AT NINE IN THE MORNING

WHILE Isabel was attending to her chores, both indoors and out, the parting words of Leonidas—as he and she had stood by the veranda—recurred to her over and over, and she wondered what the words could mean: “My story concerns my religious convictions, and—and—you.” How he had hesitated and stammered, and how his voice had trembled as he endeavored to say, “and—and—you!”

Isabel had never made a promise that she felt more anxious to keep than the one to meet Leonidas at nine o'clock that morning. As the tall clock in the hall of Arnold's house struck nine Isabel rapped at the door of Uncle Zeke's cabin.

“There Miss Isabel is now,” said Leonidas. “That must be her knocking. Listen!”

“Dat's so, Mars Lonny, I tol' yer dat Missis Bel would be hyar on de tick ob dat watch, an' hyar she am,” said Zeke, as he crossed the room with unusual activity, and threw the door wide open. “Cum in, Missis Bel,” said Zeke, with hearty welcome, “hyar's Mars Lonny Darwood.”

Isabel stepped into the cabin, and stood by young Darwood's side. Her dress of coarse linen, plainly made, was singularly becoming. The light-figured

shawl, of richer texture and brighter hue, which dropped lightly about her shoulders, seemed especially designed for her. She was a trifle above medium height, and just plump enough to make her proportions perfect. The contour of her face and her features were regular and the complexion was of a pearly clearness. Her mouth was well formed and firmly set, drooping slightly at the corners, indicating a serious and firm character. Under brows almost semicircular in form beamed forth eyes of a glorious brown. Her heavy dark hair, arranged to hang in large puffs, seemed to have both noon and midnight light in its rich sheen.

As she looked up into the eyes of Leonidas she could not control the delightful emotion which fluttered her breast. Her heart beat faster than was its wont, and drove the blood into her usually pale face. Her lips quivered as she endeavored to speak, and her fingers played nervously at the waist of her dress. She wondered all the while if Leonidas could detect her emotions, or see that she was not calm. She noted his stalwart form, and saw the strong character in his handsome face. Could the mysterious influence of his presence upon her mean that she already loved him?

She was anxious to hear the story of Leonidas's banishment from home, and deferred the account of her own experiences of the night before—thrilling though they were.

"Are you ready, now, to tell me what happened yesterday?" asked Isabel with a great effort at composure, though her heart was beating like that

of a panting deer just escaping from a long and exciting chase.

Leonidas related at some length the interview with his father, explaining how emphatic had been the older man's demands.

"Miss Proctor, there was no other course open to me than the one I have chosen. My father was determined, and you know that a compromised religion is no religion at all. I could neither accept nor propose a compromise."

"I understand that part of your story," said Isabel, "and I fully justify your course. But I am curious to know just how I can be concerned in your departure from home."

Leonidas hesitated for a moment, and wondered how he might say to Isabel just what was in his heart, without appearing too abrupt. Now that he was face to face with her it was not so easy a task.

Uncle Zeke, with fine courtesy, knowing what Leonidas was likely to say to Isabel, had taken his hickory cane and gone out to view the wreckage of the great storm.

"Miss Proctor," began Leonidas with tender hesitancy, "my father is a proud man, and forbids my having anything to do with you, because he thinks you are below my station socially. He has seen us several times together, and suspects there is more than friendship between us. He became violently exasperated when I told the truth concerning it. He positively protested against my giving you any attention, as an equal, with the penalty of having to leave home if I disobeyed his command."

At the last statement, Isabel became deadly pale. With a trembling voice, and a nervous movement of her bloodless lips, she said, faltering between her words: "Mr. Darwood, and—you—didn't—agree—to—have—nothing—to—do—with — me? I'm—nothing—to—you. Why—should—you—leave—home—on—my—account?"

"No," replied Leonidas, and his countenance grew eloquent with feeling. "No, Miss Proctor, I did not agree. My father had no right to make such a demand. I am determined to treat you as you deserve to be treated, and when I had no alternative but to be discourteous to you or leave home I did not hesitate to make the choice. I am proud to have so chosen."

Leonidas, reading the emotions in Isabel's eloquent eyes, and drawing closer to where she stood, said in a somewhat unsteady voice: "Miss Proctor, you—said—you—were nothing to me when I left home on your account. You—are—now; aren't you?"

The speech was painful in its hesitancy. He ventured to lift her hand within an inch or two of his lips.

Isabel perceived where an answer to the question might end, and was not prepared for the ending. As it appeared to her, it was a direct question, and an answer might be vital. There were other matters with which her heart was throbbing which must be settled before she could dispose of the question with a monosyllable.

"Miss Proctor," said Leonidas, still holding her

hand, "you do not answer, and, though you hesitate, permit me to say that you are more to me than anyone else in the whole world."

The blood rushed to Isabel's face, and a peculiar sensation disturbed her. She trembled violently and realized that she could no longer pretend not to understand the drift of Leonidas's words.

"Do—you—mean,—Mr. Darwood,—that—you—that—you—" stammered Isabel,—“what did you say?"

"There is no reason for longer concealing the truth. I mean that I love you. You are all the world to me, and you have been since our chance meeting at the myrtles. Did I say chance? I mean providential. I cannot express what you mean to me, Miss Proctor." He now pressed her hand to his lips, holding it there for what to Isabel seemed an age. Then placing one of his arms around her, and looking into her eyes, he whispered:

"Don't call me Mr. Darwood again; call me Leonidas. May I call you Isabel?"

The question was scarcely uttered when the cabin door opened quickly, and Uncle Zeke came stumbling in without ceremony.

"Mars Gabel's crazy ergin, Missis Bel," blurted out the old man, as he nearly fell upon the floor. "Yes, indeedy, Mars Gabel's crazy ergin, an' he's holrin', an' er cryin'; an' den he sez, 'Jack, Jack, take de wretch away.' I's scyard fur yer, Mars Lonny. Is dat strange man, what I's bin tellin' yer 'bout, name Jack? Is dat who Mars Gabel means, Missis Bel?"

Isabel knew from the few words spoken by Uncle Zeke that her Uncle Gabriel was in the throes of one of his paroxysms, and that it was necessary for her to hurry to his side. The anxious expression of her face indicated that she was greatly concerned at the information.

"Be on your guard," said Isabel, anxiously, addressing Leonidas.

"Why?" asked Leonidas. "Why are you so concerned?"

"Last night," responded Isabel, hesitating, "last night a rough man came to my Uncle Gabriel's room, and they talked until four o'clock; and the strange man knew you were here, and told Uncle Gabriel."

"Did they say anything about me?" asked Leonidas, with some concern in his tone.

"Yes, much," answered Isabel. "Uncle Gabriel is afraid of you, since you came to Uncle Zeke's, and he wants this rough man to get you out of the way, and I feel sure he will accomplish your ruin if he can. It appears that he lives in the swamp; and that Uncle Gabriel wishes him, in some way, to take you where he lives. My uncle said he wanted you out of the way at almost any cost; still he didn't want this man to kill you. Do be careful."

Isabel left Leonidas and Uncle Zeke exchanging meaning looks, and hurried back to her uncle before Leonidas could have further speech with her.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE PINE WOODS

AFTER considerable deliberation Leonidas decided to seek counsel from Dr. Demster as to what course he had best pursue. The doctor was a benevolent and respected, though somewhat feared, old man, who lived at Deep Creek. As he made his simple preparation for the journey he wondered what the physician would think of his action, and whether he would understand what a crisis the interview between his father and himself had been.

Uncle Zeke was busy, meanwhile, preparing dinner for Leonidas, and when the meal was ready both he and the old slave sat together at the rough pine table. The meal was plainer than any that had ever before been set before young Darwood, and consisted of a johnnycake, a slice of fat bacon, a yam baked in the ashes, and a bowl of pot-liquor saved from the day before. There was no dessert, and the cooking was of the crudest and most primitive sort known to Southern life. Leonidas, however, did not find it difficult to adapt himself to circumstances and partook gratefully of the rough meal, which was sweetened by the hospitality of Uncle Zeke.

"Uncle Zeke," said Leonidas, as they rose from the table, "it is time for me to start for Deep Creek.

It's eight miles, you know, and I want to get there before dark. Which is the best way out, so as to attract the least attention? If I am seen by Mr. Arnold's sister, Betty, it will excite suspicion, and start a great many questions as to why I am here, though, from what Isabel says, my presence is already suspected."

"Mars Lonny," said Uncle Zeke, "yer jes slip out'n de back doe, an' down jam by de line of sicamoes ter de gate. Mabbe nobody won't see yer. When yet gits haf way down de sicamoe lane, dars er path dat cuts through dat pine woods. Mars Lonny, yer jes keep under de sicamoes. Min' now, what I's tellin' yer. Don't go through dat pine woods. Dars er branch dat runs through de woods, but, Mars Lonny, I ax yer not ter go ter dat branch. Keep out'n de pine woods." As Zeke uttered these words his voice faltered; his limbs trembled, and he dropped back upon the stool where Leonidas had been sitting.

The appeal in both word and voice, and the peculiar advice about the pine woods, and the branch, aroused the interest of young Darwood. His curiosity had been so recently excited at Uncle Zeke's mention of the "Dark Day," that as he stood looking into the old man's eyes he wondered if there were any connection between the "Dark Day," the "pine woods," and the "branch."

"Uncle Zeke, why don't you want me to go through the pine woods? It is a much nearer way, and I should not be so likely to attract attention. Once in the woods, I should be sure to get off the

farm without being seen. When I reach the road, there will be no questions for you to answer. You see it is far better for all of us, Miss Isabel, you and myself, for me to go through the woods."

"It looks dat way ter yer, Mars Lonny," the old slave reluctantly admitted, "but ol' Zeke tells yer not ter go through dat pine woods, an' down by dat branch. Min' what I tells yer, Mars Lonny. I means what I sez. Don't yer go in dat woods."

"But why shouldn't I go, Uncle Zeke?" persisted Leonidas. "I should like to know. There is nothing in there to hurt me, is there?"

"Y-e-e-e-e-s surree, dar am, Mars Lonny," protested Uncle Zeke, becoming more and more nervous, "dars er ghost in dat pine woods; an' he walks up an' down de branch, an' wades in de worter; an' when he gits tard er walkin' he sets down under er big pine tree, an' hols his han' up ter his head; an' I knows jes why he hols his han' up ter his head, too."

"And so you think there is a ghost in the woods, do you, Uncle Zeke?"

"Y-e-e-e-e-s surree, dat I duz. I knows it right smart. I's dun seed dat ghost; an' he dun jes lak I tells yer," said Zeke, in a trembling voice, as he observed that Leonidas was a trifle skeptical about the presence of the ghost.

"How long has the ghost been in the woods?"

Uncle Zeke hesitated for a moment, arose from the cricket, and walked back and forth across the floor. Tremulously, and with evidence of great uneasiness, he finally said, "Mars Lonny, dat ghost

dun bin in dat woods ebber sence de 'Dark Day' what I's bin tellin' yer 'bout."

"Whose ghost do you suppose it is? and why do you think it stays in that particular piece of woods? Why has it been in there only since the 'Dark Day'? Have you never seen the ghost anywhere else but in the pine woods?"

"Don't ax me dat, Mars Lonny," said the old man, shuddering at the fire of questions. "Zeke knows, but he hain't gwine ter tell dat." In his agitation he sank from the stool into a heap upon the floor.

Leonidas stepped quickly to the old man and helped him to the seat, conjecturing that there must be some vital connection between the "Dark Day" and the ghost of the pine woods.

"Never mind, Uncle Zeke, I am not afraid of ghosts, and I think I will go through the pine woods, anyhow. It is so much nearer and seems to me to be the best way to avoid discovery."

This brought the old slave to his feet, though with considerable effort. He stood in front of Leonidas, and looking into his eyes said, in a beseeching tone, "Fur God's sake, Mars Lonny, don't go in dat woods."

"All right, Uncle Zeke, don't worry about me. I'll do the best thing. You leave the way to me. You have told me the two, and now I'll make the selection. Uncle Zeke, I'll never forget your kindness to me," said Leonidas. "The time may come when I can return the favor. If it ever does, I shall not forget you."

"Don't tell 'bout dat now, Mars Lonny; Zeke's gwine ter hep yer when he kin. Ef he kin hep yer ter git Missis Bel, he's gwine ter do dat, too."

"Thank you. I may need your help, Uncle Zeke. I mean to get her in spite of them."

"Yer jes tell ol' Zeke how ter do, an' he'll do it, Mars Lonny," said the old man, earnestly.

"I may need you in many ways, but you can more than likely be of service to me in getting word to Miss Isabel. It may happen that I shall send some word to her, and I shall expect you to take it to her in person. Never deliver it to any one else. If I find a trusty messenger he may be compelled to come at night, and if he does I shall tell him to rap on your door five times—twice very hard, and twice not so hard, and once quite loud again. You will not forget this signal, will you, Uncle Zeke?"

"No, Mars Lonny, I shan't furgit. I's got it right now," went on Uncle Zeke, with evident satisfaction; "five knocks; two loud uns, two easy uns, an' den wun moe loud un. Hain't dat it?"

"That is right."

Leonidas left the cabin by the back door, and wound his way in and out among the slave huts which still stood at Briarcrest, and the debris which was left strewn around after the great storm, until he entered the lane bounded on both sides by the huge sycamores. As he hurried toward the roadway on the east of the farm his mind was busy with thoughts engendered by the conversation with Uncle Zeke. In a moment more Leonidas stood at the entrance of the path which led through the pine

woods. It was partly obscured by a growth of wild honeysuckles and swamp laurel, but there was no doubt in his mind that this was the one described by Uncle Zeke. He hesitated a moment, debating whether he should take the path or keep on along the road.

The decision was soon made, and he disappeared in the undergrowth and was soon among the pines. In the midst of the skirt of pines there is a stream that runs lazily through Briarcrest, winding its way without a ripple from one end of the farm to the other. But for the little obstructions of fallen limbs, and the accumulations of pine needles and leaves, the sound of the brook would never be heard save after a great fall of rain, such as was the case on the previous night. Leonidas leaped the stream with the aid of an oak limb that had been dislodged from the tree. As he alighted upon the other side his left foot struck violently against the bank. In the dirt and straw dislodged he discovered what to him looked like a medal. A closer inspection revealed it to be one of a unique design, the like of which he had never seen before.

This medal consisted of a cross of ten points made of white enameled metal, edged heavily around with gold, the points of the cross being ornamented between with a wreath of laurel. In the center, forming the body of the cross, was a circle of blue, around the circumference of which were the words, "Napoleon III, Empereur des Français." In the middle of the azure circle was the profile of the Emperor Louis Napoleon, while over the medal, and



MEDAL OF LEGION OF HONOR OF THE SECOND FRENCH EMPIRE

attached to the points of the cross with links of gold, was a miniature facsimile of the imperial crown of France. This was attached to what seemed to be a piece of faded red ribbon, though it was difficult to tell just what the original color had been. On the ribbon could be distinctly discerned a single spot, darker in color than the surrounding texture. For the curious spot there was no apparent explanation.

Leonidas, of course, surmised that the medal was now, or had been, owned by some French nobleman. The design upon the face of it indicated that it belonged to one of high rank who had figured conspicuously in the affairs of the Second French Empire, and that the owner of the medal was a member of the Legion of Honor.

Leonidas knew that the Legion of Honor was a rank of distinction instituted by the great Napoleon. Its object was to counteract the tendencies of royalty that might be slumbering after the great upheaval. But there is no doubt now that the members were designed by him to be the noblemen of his future Imperialistic Government, which end he always had in mind. So formidable did the Legion become, and so indissolubly a part of France, that even after the fall of Napoleon and the collapse of the Empire it never lost its identity. Despite the instability of the French mind and the many vicissitudes of government—whether Consulate, Republic, Empire or Kingdom—it did much to shape the nation's policy.

Under the regime of Napoleon III there were

changes in the Legion, among which was a modification of the insignia, which now bore his own image and the inscription of the Second Empire.

Why this medal should be on Arnold's farm, how long it had lain there, and to whom it belonged, were questions which insistently flitted through the brain of Leonidas. The presence of the medal in this obscure spot might be accounted for by the owner's having been hunting in the pine woods and losing it. However, this explanation was not satisfactory, and the dark spot on the ribbon grew curiously important to him. From the general appearance of the medal he judged that it had not been there a great length of time; and though the red ribbon had faded, its state of preservation showed that it had not long been exposed to the elements. The fact that it bore the imprint of the Empire of Napoleon III indicated its recent origin.

Leonidas was not disposed to be of a mysterious turn of mind, but, despite his effort to look at the finding of the medal in a matter-of-fact way, he felt that in connection with it there must be a strange history. He put the medal in his trousers' pocket and resumed his way through the lonely woods to the Gosport road, speculating on probable solutions of the mystery. When out of the pines he took the medal from his pocket to examine it more closely, and, rubbing it against the sleeve of his coat to remove the dirt still adhering to it, he discovered what he had not seen before: it was in inscription upon the reverse side.

It was in French, and Leonidas could not get its

full meaning, but the date and name were strikingly significant and suggestive. It consisted of these words: "Adjugé au Comte de Bussy pour des services galants à Magenta et à Solferino en l'an de Grâce 1859."

As Leonidas came to the point where the Gosport road and the Deep Creek road, leading from Portsmouth, intercept, a rattlesnake lay coiled under an osage-orange hedge, and, after the manner of his kind, upon hearing the sound of the young man's approach, shook his rattles vigorously, and then sprang several times its length in the direction of the intruder. The rattlesnake, being almost sightless and trusting only to sound, missed Leonidas, who was moving at a rapid gait, passed the calf of his leg and dropped twelve inches or more beyond his foot. He instantly realized his danger, and with a hickory stick which he carried dealt one blow which straightened the venomous reptile its full length upon the ground just as it was ready for the second assault.

As soon as Leonidas recovered from the shock of surprise at the snake's attack he recalled the fact that there is a superstition in Tidewater to the effect that a vital relation exists between one's enemies and a snake. To kill the snake, it is claimed, is to overcome all of one's enemies. Of course, he had no faith in the superstition, but against his will it made its impression on him and filled him with new resolution and courage.

At dusk Leonidas crossed the bridge over the stream on which Deep Creek is situated, and entered

the village. Presently his ear detected a distressed groan as he neared the tavern. He distinctly heard, but could not tell the meaning of the words which he recognized as coming from Ezra, the wounded bear trainer:

“Gewald! Gewald! In Gots numen rahtivit mich.”

Leonidas entered the tavern, made arrangements for the night's stay, and found his way to the suffering man's room, where he was received with joy so intense that for the moment Ezra forgot his pain.

CHAPTER IX

CONCERNING JACK MOBALY

By three in the morning, after the killing of the bear, the market folk had departed from the village. The place was left perfectly quiet, except as the residents of Deep Creek gathered around the front of Audierne Tavern to view the dead bear, whose body still remained where it had fallen. One after another walked to the place, to linger only a moment, shake his head and walk away with some comment upon the ruffian in the red shirt who caused the trouble between the bear and his master.

Theories concerning the man were abundant. One person claimed to have knowledge of him, and to have recognized him as he struck the bear with the whip. Three young men of the village were discussing his identity quietly near the tavern.

"Joe, do you mean to say that you have seen the fellow in the red shirt before?" asked Will Cherry, as they bent their heads closer together lest some one might overhear.

"Unless I am very much mistaken, I have seen that man before; and while I would not care to swear to it, there is little doubt in my mind that I have seen him before yesterday," replied Joe Garry, with a degree of assurance in his manner that inspired confidence.

"But where in the world did you ever see him?" questioned Jim Culpepper. "He is a perfect stranger about the Creek, and no one seems to know anything about him."

"In the courthouse in Portsmouth," answered Joe Garry, promptly, and in spite of himself raising his voice.

"Not so loud, Joe," said the other two young men, at once.

"Let us get to a quieter place," suggested Will Cherry.

The three moved behind the northwest corner of the house. When they had seated themselves upon a cypress log Jim Culpepper touched Garry upon the arm and said in a commanding tone, "Blaze away, Joe; we won't be interrupted here."

"Well, as I was saying," said Garry, "I saw that man in the courthouse in Portsmouth about one year ago, as near as I can come at it. He was being tried for burning a house down, and the case was so clear against him that he was sentenced for ten years at hard labor in the Richmond penitentiary. There were three of them implicated in the crime. It was said at the time that one of them furnished the light wood, another the matches, and the third set fire to the house. They caught the man who furnished the matches, and he turned state's evidence, which caused the arrest of the other two. The scamp who told on the others was released for his services as a witness for the state, and—"

"What a low trick that was!" interrupted Culpepper.

"Well, they pardoned the man they first caught," continued Garry, "for telling on the other two. Then they were tried, and the strangest thing occurred. That is, while they were equally guilty, they failed to convict one, but sentenced the other man to serve ten years. The people said the jury was influenced because the man's father had money and stood well among the bontons of the town. You see, the other man had no money, of course, had no friends, and the court gave him a heavy sentence. I do not think they were too hard on him, but they ought to have served them all alike."

"But, how is this," asked Cherry "you said they convicted the red shirt fellow, and sent him up for ten years, only a year ago. This don't hold together, does it, Joe?"

"Well, wait, can't you?" demanded Garry. "They put him into jail in town for a few days, until the sheriff could take him to Richmond; during that time he broke jail, and the authorities claim they have not been able to locate him since."

This greatly interested the two listeners, and one of them arose from the cypress log and walked a few steps away, turning quickly, hurried back, and asked with great earnestness: "Joe Garry, do you really think that fellow is Jack Mobaly? Your story seems to tally with the facts of the story of the fire in town when they arrested Jonas Pearson, Hiram Hicks and Jack Mobaly."

"Boys, unless I'm very much mistaken, the man in the red shirt was Jack Mobaly. You know it has been reported for quite a while that a strange man

has been seen about the Creek, and nobody seems to know who he is. Also, a stranger has often been seen going to old Gabriel Arnold's at Briarcrest, always at night, and no one has been able to tell just who he is. Now I'm inclined to think that the two are the same person, and by name Jack Mobaly."

"You surely don't think he has lived in the swamp ever since he broke jail, do you, Joe?"

"Yes, I do," said Joe, emphatically. "He never went to Texas, as was reported. He's been living in Dismal Swamp, just as hundreds of other criminals are doing. Why, the swamp is the best hiding-place in the world, and if a refugee from justice once gets to Culpepper Island, it is no use for the authorities to look for him. Many of the criminals never come out of the swamp. They have means of communication not known to many people in the outside world. But Jack Mobaly is more daring than many of them. After he had been there long enough to grow long whiskers and hair, and change his appearance, he grew bold enough to take risks."

"But, Joe, couldn't this fellow in the red shirt be one of the traders?"

"Why, no," replied Garry, with a note of impatience in his voice. "He fell in with the market people a short distance up the road, and came here with them to throw the officers off the trail. Who ever heard of a Carolina trader having on a red flannel shirt? He isn't half-sharp, or he would get a suit of fustian, if he wanted to pass as a trader."

"By the way, why do you suppose Mobaly goes

secretly to Briarcrest to see old Arnold?" asked Will Cherry, who had been listening more than engaging in the conversation.

"I don't know, of course," replied Garry, "but I've an opinion about that, too. Before Mobaly got into that fire trouble he was at Briarcrest a great deal, and took part in the chicken fights there, and always bet on Club Foot in the races. In fact, he and Arnold had been intimate for some time. The night he broke jail he went first to Briarcrest, on his way out to the swamp. They are of the same stripe, I tell you. I don't suppose old Gabriel ever burned anybody's house, as Mobaly did, but if the truth were known I should not be much surprised if he has done pretty nearly as bad or maybe worse."

"You don't mean that Arnold is a criminal!" exclaimed one of the young men in surprise.

"I don't know, but people say he has been acting mighty queer lately. Besides, he has an old negro down there at Briarcrest who is boss of the whole place and has Gabriel Arnold under his thumb as well. You know there is something wrong when an old slave can have such an influence over his master; though I do not say he has ever committed any crime, I—"

"Hush! Listen! Boys, what's that?" broke in Culpepper, rising to go. "Let's leave here. Whoever closed that window may have overheard us."

Joe Garry had but stated the truth concerning Mobaly. Within a few days after his sentence was pronounced, with several other convicts, he had es-

caped from jail. Mobaly reached Dismal Swamp and made good his escape; and there he had lived, going in and out of the swamp at great risk but all the while escaping discovery.

For many years the "runaway" blacks and the criminal whites had made Dismal Swamp a hiding-place—the one class from their merciless masters, the other from the iron grip of the law. When once in the swamp they felt in a measure secure. While fleeing, they were often trailed by the keen Southern bloodhounds, and sometimes torn to death before relief could reach them. But it was seldom that the absconding slaves were captured after having made their way into the jungle. The whites, too, were captured only when they ventured again into the outside world.

The trade in cypress and juniper shingles furnished occupation to those who were voluntary prisoners in the swamp, and through it hundreds of whites and blacks alike sustained life. Whole families were reared who had never seen any phase of life except that which prevailed in their swamp-prison.

The means of communication with the outside world were as unique and carefully arranged as was the method of transportation on the famous "underground railroad" by which thousands of slaves made their escape into the Northern States and, after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, into Canada.

A shingle "contractor" was generally the link of communication between the outer world and the

world of the great swamp. The larger number of the refugees congregated in camps, but others, for secret reasons, preferred to live isolated. All felled trees and converted them into "split" shingles, which were delivered to the "contractor," he paying for their labor, and converting their earnings into provisions, clothing and such other things as were required to make this life endurable.

Many of the swamp "contractors" were themselves slaves, working out their freedom. They, therefore, had sympathy with the "runaways," and would rather die than betray them, even had such treachery been worth the risk of life it entailed. In many cases the dwellers in the swamp were never across its borders after their first entrance to its friendly recesses, and to live they were dependent upon the "contractor." But the dependence was mutual, as his business depended upon them, and thus their necessity for protection and secrecy was his advantage also.

Into this kind of life Jack Mobaly had gone. It was really exchanging one prison for another, but, still to be able to breathe outside of four walls, and have comparative freedom was far preferable to the dank cell in the Portsmouth jail or hard labor in the Richmond penitentiary. For a time he was content to breathe the deadly miasma rising from the perpetual dampness of the swamp, and see the Jack-o'-lantern play hither and thither in the dense forest surrounding his cabin. He labored at shingle splitting and shingle shaving, and sat astride of his wood-horse with iron teeth and used a drawing

knife until great calloused patches arose upon the palms of his hands and joints of his fingers. The coarse fare and the red water of Dismal Swamp contented him and he lived in the crudest kind of cabin, in which he could lie upon his shuck mattress and count the stars above the great cypress and juniper trees through the apertures in the roof.

Civilization and all its conveniences of living were for a time almost forgotten, in the stress of the wild new life. At length the stillness of this isolation became an annoyance to him. He tired of hearing only the growl of the bear, the bark of the wolf, the chatter of the squirrel, the sissing of the water moccasin and the peculiar tremor of the rattlesnake. Rarely any other sounds broke the silence save those from his own implements of toil, and that which came from his own footfall, and even these startled him at times.

Finally, seeing for many months no one but fugitive slaves and men of his own type, Jack Mobaly found swamp life becoming unendurable. He hungered for a sight of the outside world. He had lost count of time, for, unlike Alexander Selkirk, he had failed to keep tally, and now all days were alike to him.

In early autumn, after a morning spent in search of a bear, Jack Mobaly stood under a juniper tree near the corner of his cabin, with bowed head and serious countenance, looking into the red swamp water. He was living his life over in thought. The sun peeped through the tops of the trees and the wild grape-vine overhanging the little pond, and he

saw his image reflected in the surface of the water. As he gazed upon the picture, and saw the hair, which dropped upon his shoulders, curling at the end, and his long, black whiskers, which caused him to look more like a bear than a man, he realized for the first time that his appearance had changed entirely in the nine months since his escape from jail.

"Who would know Jack Mobaly now?" he asked himself, with a note of exultation in his voice.

He put his musket inside the cabin, took his large leather whip, pulled the door shut, and was soon carefully treading his secret path toward Deep Creek. As he emerged upon firmer ground his eagerness became so great that he crashed through the forest at a swift pace. He was hungry for real life in a genuine world.

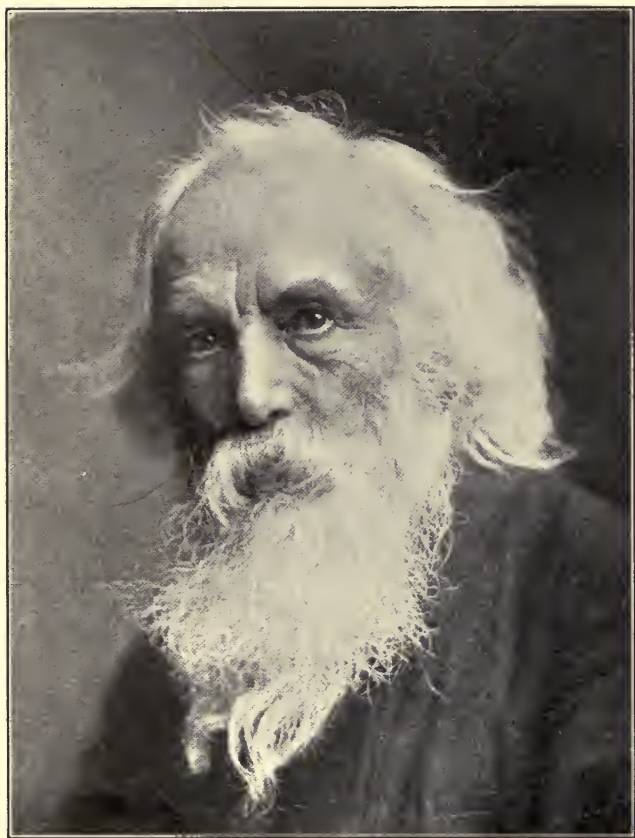
CHAPTER X

DR. DEMSTER

As soon as Leonidas arrived at Deep Creek he made an appointment with Dr. Demster for an interview at one o'clock the following afternoon. Promptly at that hour he presented himself at the office, and was asked to await the doctor's return. Leonidas found much to interest him in retrospect and surroundings, and an hour elapsed before the doctor appeared.

Dr. Demster was known to be rich. The lumber and shingle industry had been very remunerative, and he was deep in this business when the profits were largest. Now that the nation was plunged into a civil war, and the Government was paying fabulous prices in lumber contracts, the proceeds were out of proportion to the amount of investment. He practiced his profession because of his fondness for it, and for the relief he might afford the suffering within his reach, but not for the income it furnished.

There were no indications of wealth in the life of this man, but the people knew of the extent of his large and paying business. They were aware that he owned mills to convert the Dismal Swamp trees into lumber, and that he had hundreds of men, white and black, working early and late in



DR. DEMSTER

the manufacture of shingles; and that his own vessels transported these products to the markets of the world. But where his great income was deposited no one could tell. He did not use it on his home, for this had long since become shabby and dilapidated. To judge from appearances, he would have been rated as one of the poorest, rather than the richest man in the Dismal Swamp region of Virginia.

He was known to have no confidence in the banks of his day, and as he did not deposit his money in them it gave rise to many speculations as to what disposition he made of it. Some said he hid it away in his old house, and that he allowed his home to run down in appearance to discredit this fact, and others declared that he buried it in the woods, as rich men were known to do in Tidewater before the days of the banks.

His appearance was that of a man who was dissatisfied and unhappy in life. He never cultivated the acquaintance of the village folk, and on more than one occasion had indicated his desire to be let alone. When compelled to meet the neighbors he passed but few words, and soon dispatched his business. In his professional calls he diagnosed the case, gave brief direction and departed as soon as possible. His peculiarities led the people to avoid him, except when there was sickness in the community, when he was speedily sought. Everybody had confidence in his skill and trusted his judgment; but the village folk all agreed that Dr. Demster was a queer old man.

In the evening, about the hour of sunset, he often strolled through the thicket behind his house and wandered down by the creek which ran lazily by the village, or sat beneath the weeping willow which dipped the tips of its branches in the sluggish stream. As he walked, with his shoulders drooped, his head bowed, with his chin resting on his breast, his long, white hair and beard mingling at the sides of his face, and his arms crossed behind him, the people watched and wondered. And as he sat under the willow—an appropriate place for one so sad—now and then, slowly tossing chips of bark into the water, and watching them drift away with the tide, they shook their heads in surmise.

Dr. Demster's house stood at the intersection of the two streets, and was the most imposing structure in the village. It was by no means a plain building, though built in this obscure town, and was covered with weatherboards every strip of which was beaded, and there were moldings of exquisite design.

The office was not tidy in appearance. The heavy moldings at the corners, where the wall and ceiling came together, had grown gray with age, as they had not been painted or cleaned in many years. The chairs were of colonial style, but as much soiled with dirt and grease as the other furniture. The upholstering had long since been torn away, and rough cypress boards had been nailed in the bottoms, so they might still be put to the use for which they were intended. An old sofa stood diagonally across the southeast corner of the room, and its

sharp ends had been jammed against the wall so often that not only the plastering had been dislodged, but the laths were broken, and stuck out in splinters in every direction, reminding one of a retreating porcupine. Before the sofa stood a tall clock of peculiar design, which told not only the hour, but the day of the week and month, and registered the different phases of the moon, and indicated flow of the tides. A rickety table supported a few medical books and papers.

In one corner stood a box made of rough white-oak lumber, and fastened in it with crude wire staples, and standing in an erect position, were the bones of a tall man. The skeleton was in a perfect state of preservation. The large, white teeth grinned hideously, and some patches of kinky black hair still adhered to the skull. Pasted on the frontal bone was a slip of paper on which the following was plainly written:

"These are the bones of the slave, Pompey, who once belonged to Gabriel Arnold. The negro ran away from Briarcrest in hopes of escaping to the swamp. He was pursued by Arnold's bloodhounds, overtaken and killed by the dogs near Culpepper Island. Here his body lay until the flesh had been consumed by birds of prey. Oct. 15, 1860, I found the skeleton and identified it as the remains of Pompey.

DEMSTER."

After gazing about the office Leonidas crossed the room and again stood in front of Pompey's bones to study them more closely. At the skeleton's feet he perceived a small chest with cover

raised, disclosing a quantity of gold coins of several denominations. He saw that the doctor had removed the tin chest and money from behind a secret door in the back of the large box, and had inadvertently left the door open and the chest at the skeleton's feet, so that the secret recess as well as the gold was exposed to view.

Leonidas instinctively put his hand in his trouser's pocket and found only the French medal. He knew he had no money, as he had given the last for his night's lodging at the tavern. He thought of the future, and wondered how he could meet the demands to be made upon him. The way ahead was dark, and there seemed no reason why Dr. Demster should favor him in any way.

"What shall I do?" he whispered, half aloud, "I am without means. Demands will be made upon me, and I have no work. What shall I do? Shall—I—ta—? No—I can't. I have given up much for conscience's sake, but I shall at least retain my honor. What folly not to trust! I have nothing of this world, but I'll be true, and I'll tell the doctor when he comes."

Leonidas walked resolutely away from the gold and again sat at the table to await the doctor. He had examined the box of instruments, and recognized some of them as those used at the tavern in dressing Ezra's wound. He was reading a work on anatomy when the doctor pushed aside a faded curtain, that separated the office from the kitchen, and put his hand on the young man's shoulder to attract his attention.

"I see you are here before me," said he, taking the chair by Leonidas. "How long have you waited?"

"About an hour," answered Leonidas, and without delay called the doctor's attention to the gold in the little tin chest.

"Well, my boy, you are honest, to say the least of it."

"I hope always to be honest," said Leonidas, simply.

Nothing more was said about the gold, but it was evident that the incident had made a favorable impression on the old doctor's mind.

"You have been here an hour," said the doctor, "but you seem interested."

"Yes, you have many things of interest," answered Leonidas. "The time spent has been greatly entertaining."

"What attracted you most?" questioned the doctor, suspecting what the young man would answer.

"By all odds, that," Leonidas quickly explained, pointing to the skeleton.

"Ha! Ha!" shouted the doctor. "I should like to know what there is of so much interest in a negro's bones?"

"It is not so much that they are the bones of a negro, as that they are the bones of a certain negro, and that he came to his death in a particular way, that interests me," said Leonidas. "While I have lived within a few miles of this place all my life, and have heard a great deal about the 'runaways' in Dismal Swamp, and how they are often

pursued by the bloodhounds and devoured before help can reach them, I have never before realized the fact so vividly."

"Yes, he was one of Gabriel Arnold's negroes, and the case is just as you see on the label," explained the doctor. "Arnold was so cruel to his slaves, that now and then one of them would seize a chance to run away. Pompey was the last to attempt it, and made for the swamp, but the dogs overtook him near Culpepper Island, and that was the end of him. I secured his bones, thinking they might be of interest to people who do not know so much about how negroes are run down as those who live near Dismal Swamp."

"You can't imagine how interesting that is to me. This indicates that Mr. Arnold is not very humane, if he treats his slaves so cruelly that they watch for a chance to escape. What sort of man is Mr. Arnold, Doctor?" asked Leonidas, abruptly, hoping the question would not make an unfavorable impression on the doctor, though it seemed a trifle impertinent.

"Very humane! I should say not," the doctor answered emphatically, not noting any impropriety in the question. "Nobody knows just what's the matter with him, but there's something wrong, and he does not wish to have dealings with many people lately. Yes, a great change has come over Arnold, and nobody can account for it with any degree of certainty."

"You don't think Mr. Arnold has done something he wishes to hide, do you, Doctor?" asked

Leonidas. "I suppose he doesn't care particularly about the killing of Pompey by the dogs, for, as you say, that is a common occurrence. Do you think there is something else on his mind?"

"I am afraid there is," was the doctor's deliberate reply. "From what I hear, and from what I have observed, it seems to me that Gabriel Arnold is burdened with some great secret. Of course, I do not know, and would not like to say positively, but that is my belief; and I fear, whatever it is, it is affecting him, and will do so as long as he lives. I think that he has done something he would be glad to undo."

Leonidas instantly recalled what he had heard from other sources. Uncle Zeke certainly had information concerning Gabriel Arnold, which he was not willing to communicate; and the young man under the tavern window had said something about him that was far-reaching in its meaning; and now here Dr. Demster had affirmed that old Arnold was burdened with some great secret which he dared not tell.

"What's the matter, young man? Are you listening?" demanded the doctor.

"I assure you I am listening, Doctor; and I am deeply interested as well," protested Leonidas. "I should be only too glad to hear all about it. Yes, I am more than interested."

"O, I don't know anything, but it appears to me that Gabriel Arnold is carrying a burden he would like for some one else to have," said the doctor, as he turned to walk back to the chair, and

sat down with his arms thrown carelessly across the table.

"Do you think Mr. Arnold has committed some great crime?" persisted Leonidas.

"It would seem so," said the doctor, "but, of course, no one can tell. Persons are very strangely and greatly affected, sometimes from very trifling causes. Slight things have been known to prey upon the mind and the person become a monomaniac, and, from this state of insanity, to go stark mad. But what have you to do with Gabriel Arnold? You came to consult me professionally. What is your trouble? Let me see: Your pulse is thumping away as a well man's should. Besides, your complexion is first class, and your eye is as clear as the sun. There is nothing the matter with you, as far as I can see. Why did you come to consult me?"

"The fact is, Doctor, I came to consult you about an entirely different matter," admitted Leonidas. "I need a friend to advise, and, if possible, help me. I stand alone at present. There has arisen an emergency in my life, and I'm at the forks of the road, so to speak, where it is very easy to go in the wrong direction. I've come to you, believing that you are the friend who will help me with advice."

"Well, my boy," answered the doctor, heartily, "you know advice is cheap, but before I can advise, you must tell what the trouble is. You look to be about twenty, and that is the critical period in the life of every young man, but what is the

special experience through which you are passing now? Speak freely."

The old doctor ran his fingers through his long white hair, placed his elbow upon the table, and resting his head in his hand, gazed at his young companion who had so favorably impressed him, eager to hear what he had to say.

CHAPTER XI

LEONIDAS MAKES A FRIEND

LEONIDAS related his story of the variance between his father and himself, and how his father had commanded him to change his opinions, or leave home.

"Doctor, the conviction is growing within me that to make the distinction between people that my father insists upon is wicked. Certain am I, that it is not in harmony with the Sermon on the Mount. To entertain just opinions on the rights of men, and to treat all properly, becomes a matter of serious moment with me, for I do not think a person can live the Christ-life without it."

"Then it is your religion?" inquired the doctor, "My religion insists upon it," replied Leonidas, "and I fully believe when this unchristian distinction is obliterated, and people are estimated at their real worth, the world will be a great deal happier than it is at present. I believe, further, that unless the people conform more nearly to the teaching of Christ the chasm between the classes will widen, and we may look for perilous times in the future. I know the present war is absorbing the attention of the nation, and little or no thought is given to the social problem, but the war will soon end, and the social problem will not be solved, and the rich will continue to despise the poor."

"What then?" asked the doctor, in a non-committal tone.

"I fear they will oppress them, too," continued Leonidas, "until the poor will become exasperated and resent the injustice. No one can predict where the trouble will end."

"So your sympathies go with the poor in the struggle of life," said the doctor, "and you sympathize with them because it is religious to do so. Is this it?"

"No," said Leonidas, "not because it is religious to do so, but because it is right. It is, of course, a point of religion, and is set forth in the Scriptures, and certainly was exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ."

"Have you considered what you sacrifice in leaving home?" asked the doctor. "You know your father is rich."

"Yes, I know it all, Doctor. I know exactly what it means."

"And still you left?" exclaimed the doctor, "What compensation have you for leaving?"

"A good conscience," replied Leonidas, with emphasis. "This, I think, is more to be desired than my father's fortune. I cannot have both. There was principle involved. To surrender my opinions simply for a money consideration would be the sacrifice of my self-respect, and conscience, too."

Dr. Demster had become more and more interested as the conversation proceeded. The young man had attracted him to a degree which he had

not felt toward anyone for years. He arose from his chair, walked slowly across the floor several times, his head bowed, and hands behind him, meditating upon what had been disclosed in the conversation. He paused for a moment in the corner of the room facing the skeleton, then, turning, he walked quickly to where Leonidas was sitting. Struck by a new idea, that perchance there was yet some fact that the young man had concealed, or at least had not revealed, he asked in a suggestive tone of voice:

"Is that all? Is that the only reason why your father has turned you out? Is there anything connected with it that you have not told me? You have been so candid about it, that I shall accept your statement, if you say that is all."

"No," said Leonidas, without hesitation, "that is not all. There is still another matter connected with it, which was the other of the two reasons my father assigned for his decision. It has been my purpose all the while to tell you about this as well as the other."

"But what is the other reason? It may be the real cause, after all," said the doctor, as he took his place quickly in the chair again.

"It concerns a young woman whose reputation and—"

"By the Eternal!" interrupted the doctor; "a woman in the case. Well, well, well! Have you been running after some questionable female, and for this your father has driven you out?"

"No, Doctor; don't judge me too quickly, and

I pray you do not have a suggestive thought about the character of the woman whose name and interest are involved, for I assure you she is as innocent as an angel, and was more surprised when she learned of her connection with the matter than you seem to be now."

After telling the story of Isabel Proctor's connection with his life, Leonidas continued: "Father fears that I love her, and he is not willing, as he expressed it, to have a poor servant girl enter his home as a daughter-in-law."

"You say it was a poor, but good girl?" asked the doctor, with interest and animation in every tone.

"Yes, poor, but a perfect angel on earth," answered Leonidas, "as I have learned lately, though I did not know so much about her when my father found occasion to object to her."

"Who is she? May I ask? Though I suppose this makes no difference, and is none of my business."

"I want you to know," responded Leonidas, quickly, though he felt a trifle concerned, lest the mention of Isabel's name might precipitate a question which he was not quite ready to answer. "Her name is Isabel Proctor."

"Isabel Proctor, Isabel Proctor," muttered the old physician, as if to recall some memory; "Isabel Proctor—why she's Gabriel Arnold's niece. Is that the girl you mean?"

"Yes, Doctor," answered Leonidas, "it is Isabel Proctor, Mr. Arnold's niece, on whose account,

partially, I'm away from home. When father saw me talking with her, he assumed that I was becoming intimate with a poor girl, and forbade my ever speaking to her again. I could see no reason for this prohibition and I refused to comply with his demand. So far as I've ever heard, Miss Proctor is a young woman of good character, though she is poor. Why should I avoid her simply because the difference between us can be removed with money? To my mind, good character is the all-important thing, and this, I believe, Miss Proctor possesses. If she were a person of questionable character, I should avoid her as I would a viper; or if there were a breath of suspicion concerning her reputation, I should hesitate a long while before permitting any more than a speaking acquaintance. I see no reason why there should be an embargo placed upon any relation between Miss Proctor and me, and, since I have come to know her, I don't propose that there shall be."

"I suppose," said the doctor, after a short silence, "you intended to leave home rather than surrender your principles, and the matter of your relation with the Proctor girl was of minor importance. What would you have decided as between the girl and your home and future fortune?"

"I should have decided just as I have done, for I have no patience with the spirit of my father and that of the remainder of the Darwood family. They and some of the self-styled first families of Virginia look with contempt upon poor people, as not worthy of their notice, and would not, in any cir-

cumstances, associate with those out of their class. This, I consider, is not in keeping with the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth. If there were any discrimination at all, it seemed to have been in favor of the poor. I think there was no difference with the Great Teacher, and I have no right to make any."

"And this is a part of your religion; is it?" asked the doctor, again growing animated, and leaning forward.

"Yes, and it appears to me to be the chief need of the world," said Leonidas.

"My boy, is there nothing more than that in your relation with the Proctor girl?"

"Well, yes, Doctor," admitted Leonidas, "there is now, but there was not when I left home. The motives that I have mentioned are the only ones that influenced me in my decision. When the trouble occurred Isabel Proctor was no more to me than any other young woman, and so my decision was made in a general way, and if it had involved any other person I should not have acted differently."

"Is Isabel Proctor more to you than any other girl now?" inquired the doctor. "You are quite young yet, my boy."

"She is more than anyone else, Doctor."

"You are, then, in love," said the old physician.

"You may call it what you like, but my fondness for Isabel Proctor has in the last few days become very great. Yes, Doctor; I'm in love, I suppose," admitted the young man, blushing and moving nervously under the scrutiny of penetrating eyes.

The old physician paused for a moment, and appeared to be turning some thought over in his mind, his neck craned, so that his head lay nearly upon his shoulder, meanwhile tapping on the table with the ends of his fingers.

"My boy," said the old doctor, suddenly aroused from his thoughtful attitude, "all you have said and done is just as it should be. To my mind, it is beyond criticism; but does it not occur to you that to allow yourself to think seriously of the Proctor girl will necessitate your crossing the path of Gabriel Arnold? He is a very wicked man, and the less you have to do with him the better. If you determine to woo and win the girl, be careful of her uncle, for there is no telling what desperate thing he will do."

"Since the night of the big storm my suspicion has been aroused," answered Leonidas. "He may be wicked, and may wish to defeat my purpose, but still I don't think he will succeed."

"What has aroused your suspicion? Has anyone told you of some specific act committed by Arnold?"

"The old slave knows something about Mr. Arnold which he doesn't care to tell, and whenever he even thinks about it he becomes greatly excited. There certainly is some secret between them," explained Leonidas.

"Is that all?" questioned the doctor, determined to understand the matter fully.

"When I left Uncle Zeke he cautioned me about going through the pine woods at Briarcrest, and

made much of the branch, and a big pine tree. The old man declares he has seen in the woods a ghost which sits under the big pine tree holding its hand to its head. I have reason to think it was under that very tree that I found this," responded Leonidas, taking the French medal from his pocket and handing it to the doctor.

CHAPTER XII

THE DOCTOR'S STORY

"NAPOLEON III!" exclaimed the doctor, his eyes flashing as he looked at the profile of the Emperor on the medal. "Legion of Honor, eh! I'd be willing to pay a forfeit if I couldn't guess to whom it belonged."

"There is an inscription on it in French, and you may be able to translate more of it than I can, but even the name on it aroused my curiosity when I discovered it."

The doctor turned the medal over and read aloud:

"Awarded to Comte de Bussy for gallant services at Magenta and Solferino in the year of grace 1859."

"Why it's no trouble for you to read it," remarked Leonidas, "and I am glad I showed it to you, as I have wondered about the significance of the inscription."

"O, yes, I can read French," said the doctor, smiling at the young man, "but I deserve no special credit for that. I, myself, am French by birth, and, of course, everything from that country or language interests me greatly, and—"

"Are you French? You French!" exclaimed

Leonidas in surprise. "Strange I never heard that before."

"That is my secret," said the doctor, after a moment's pause, "and there are other facts about me not known here, but I will tell you this now. My father was implicated in the French Revolution, and took a prominent part during the Reign of Terror. At first he became a Revolutionist, and was allied with Robespierre, Danton and Marat. But these men went further in their wickedness and slaughter than he dreamed they would, at the outbreak of the Revolution, and he believed, for the good of France, they, themselves, should go to the guillotine. My father made an effort to retrace his steps and undo what he had done. He preferred the kings and the feudal system to the upheaval produced by these three leaders of the Revolutionists.

"He used to entertain me, when I was a boy, by telling me of his thrilling experiences during those trying days. He told me that he furnished the knife to Charlotte Corday with which she assassinated Marat, and that he had something to do with the plot that ended in Danton's humiliation, and was present when he mounted the scaffold. Once I asked him what he himself did, but this was a part of his life he would never tell me. He said he saw Robespierre in mortal terror when he was led to the guillotine, and was standing near when his head dropped into the basket.

"When this man was approaching the end my father led in the cry, 'Down with the tyrant!' This

practically ended the Reign of Terror, but still my father felt insecure, and escaped to America under the assumed name of Demster. By this name I have always been known. My real name is De Verrier. After quiet was partially restored father returned to France, leaving my mother and me in America. Mother died after a while, and left me to battle with the world alone. When he returned to France my father allied himself with Napoleon and was one of the foremost leaders of his select men. He fought in many battles, and was side by side with de Bussy at Friedland, Luxembourg and Verdun. I mean, of course, the young Count's father.

"This was while I was young, but you can see why I am interested in everything French, and why it is natural for me to read the language. Of course, the sight of that medal awakens a thousand recollections of the exciting days of my childhood, but it also stirs me greatly over what has occurred of late. You see why anything with Count de Bussy's name on it would interest me."

"Yes," answered Leonidas, "but what significance has the medal?"

"It is a mark of distinction even to own such a medal," continued the doctor. "This one, as the inscription indicates, belongs to Count de Bussy, and was presented to him for his heroic service for the Emperor's cause in Italy. Magenta and Solferino tell the whole story. I am interested in de Bussy, because of his father's relation to my father in the great Napoleon's battles, but your finding

the medal in the pine woods at Briarcrest under the big tree is of more interest still, and is forcing my mind to an inevitable conclusion, much as I regret to entertain it. But what is this spot on the ribbon?"

"What is it, Doctor? It attracted my attention soon after I found it, and I have wondered ever since what it is, and why it is there."

The old physician took the medal, detached the ribbon, and placed it under a microscope. He looked for a moment, then turned suddenly and walked across the floor, exclaiming excitedly, "W-e-e-e-ll, by the Eternal Justice!"

"What is it?" Leonidas demanded, with increased interest. "What is it?"

"Iron rust, or the stain from the leaves of some forest tree containing hemoglobine, or blood," said the doctor, looking directly at Leonidas and shaking his head ominously.

The old man seemed lost in thought, and at length young Darwood, thinking he had occupied too much time already, arose to leave. He thanked the doctor most cordially for the generous expression of confidence, but felt that the initiative offer of help must come without his suggestion. He stepped over to where the doctor had placed himself near the great fireplace and took the old man's hand in both of his own, saying:

"Doctor, I must leave now. I hope to see you soon again. Will you be at the tavern to see Ezra to-morrow?"

"Yes," he answered, recovering his former in-

terest, "but before you go I wish to tell you that I like you. Yes, I like you, and henceforth I shall be your friend. You have been so true to your convictions, and so just in your treatment of others, and so honest with my gold, that I like you as I have not liked anyone for many long years. Will you be my friend? I need a friend worse than you know. There is an awful void in my life and my heart aches, and has since Annie went away."

"Since Annie went away?" echoed Leonidas, mentally. He then decided that Annie must have been some one who had figured largely in the old man's early life, and hoped he might hear more of the story.

"My heart aches, and has ever since my Annie left, and I thought it would always ache," continued the doctor, "but all at once you've come to be my friend, and fill the place in my life. No, not fill it, that can't ever be, but if you let me be your friend, and are my friend, you will, in a measure, fill a place in a wretched old man's life that has not been filled for many a long and dreary day. Will you take an old man, nearly in the grave, for your friend? And will you be my friend? Will you believe me, and trust me? I believe and trust you already. This is strange talk for a rich old man to a boy, but since Annie went I have yearned, yes, almost died for someone to love and trust."

The doctor drew his hand from the young man's grasp, and put it on his shoulder for an instant, and, looking into his eyes, said, "Stay until I return."

He passed into the hall and up the stairs. His

house, save his own bedroom, was empty, and Leonidas could hear his footsteps as he stalked from one place to another. He entered his own chamber, and went to the corner, near the head of his bed, to a small closet built into the wall, almost concealed from view. He looked around, turning his eyes from one side to the other, and then glanced under the bed. Satisfied that no one was near, he placed a small brass key in the lock of a little door, which suddenly flew open. He took from the top shelf a mahogany box, and went slowly down, placing it upon the table by which Leonidas stood.

He took from the box a number of old, musty papers, and handled them as if they were of no special value, though they were deeds, deeds of trust, and notes of various kinds, representing many thousand dollars. He then seized a package of letters that were of more interest, judging from the manner in which he handled them, and laid them upon the table, occasionally taking them up in his hands, turning them over, looking at them affectionately. Finally the doctor removed a small thin package, which was carefully tied with silk cord. Leonidas saw at once that this object, whatever it might be, was invested with an interest that nothing else in the box possessed.

As he began to untie the silk string the old man's hands trembled, and he himself shook from head to foot, as if stirred by some great emotion. He carefully removed the covering and handed Leonidas the sacred contents of the little package. It was a

picture of a sweet, earnest young woman, with remarkably fine eyes, and was evidently painted by the hand of some master artist, inclosed in a frame of exquisite workmanship, the whole being not more than four inches wide and six inches in length. Across the lower right hand corner was an inscription—the name “Annie Hewlett,” and nothing more.

“Doctor,” said Leonidas, after gazing at the picture, “this is a beautiful, spirituelle face. Is it a likeness of some dear friend?”

“More than dear friend,” said the doctor, and his voice trembled. “This is what I wish to tell you. Nobody here knows, but I want you to know, because I love you, and can trust you. That’s my Annie. I loved her when I was a young man like you. I looked like you then. My hair was black, then, too. Everybody said I was handsome, and they knew Annie was pretty and good. Annie loved me, and one day, under a big willow tree she took my hand in her beautiful white hands and admitted it. Yes, that’s my Annie, and she wanted to be mine for good and all, but they wouldn’t let me have her. No, they wouldn’t let me have my Annie.”

The old man broke into a flood of tears, then in an uncontrollable fit of sobbing, he threw his head upon his arms which lay folded upon the table, and between his sobs said: “That’s my Annie, and they wouldn’t let me have her. They said I was poor. They watched her and locked her in a room.”

"How cruel!" Leonidas exclaimed.

The old man forgot his grief for a moment and said: "She dropped me a note out of the window." He drew a slip of paper, yellow with age, from the package of letters, and passed it to Leonidas, who read:

"MY DEAR EUSTACE: I love only you, and will love you forever. Be patient. I will be yours some day. Your loving

ANNIE."

"Yes, she meant to be mine, and she is mine; but when she couldn't see me she turned pale, and sickened and died. This is why I have always lived alone. I have had no one to love since Annie went away," continued the old man, as his voice trembled with emotion.

"Your life must have been almost unbearable," said Leonidas, looking with pity upon the old physician, as the great tears ran down his haggard face to mingle with his long, white beard, thinking all the while of the possible impediments that might be placed between him and Isabel, and wondering if he, too, would have a like sad experience.

The doctor arose from where he was sitting, rubbing his hands together, and walked across the floor, all the while saying in a subdued voice: "My Annie, my Annie. They locked her up. They killed her."

CHAPTER XIII

ARNOLD'S CASE IS DIAGNOSED

ISABEL sat at the front window of Gabriel Arnold's room, looking out upon the wreckage of the previous night's storm, and meditating upon the disclosures made in Uncle Zeke's cabin. What an experience! And what revelations had been made! Leonidas had revealed his love for her. He certainly had expressed himself in most emphatic language; but had she admitted her love for him? She had made a great effort not to do so, but feared he had read her thoughts and observed her emotion as she had looked up into his anxious face.

Gabriel Arnold, in haste, had thrown himself on the bed without removing even his topcoat. He was sleeping, but his sleep was broken. He tossed from side to side, talking at times of things that troubled him, and his mutterings broke into Isabel's reverie. She wondered what he was saying and what it all portended, as she arose and went to his bedside.

As she was about to speak to him she observed that he was still sleeping, though now and again he muttered disconnected phrases, and at times groaned, as though suffering. This distress seemed not to be physical pain, but that which was far worse—mental anguish. She stood by his side and

watched the wild expression of his countenance. He arose in bed and lifted both hands as if in the act of striking some one standing near by, grinding his teeth tightly as he did so. Then he brought his hands down quickly, as if wielding a bludgeon in the act of striking a heavy blow, saying fiercely:

"There, you foreign devil, take that! You infernal Frenchman!"

Isabel trembled in alarm, and could scarcely resist the impulse to rush to awaken him out of what she thought must be a horrible dream. She did not, however, but paused for what might follow.

Gabriel Arnold was now sitting in an upright position, with the bed covers twisted in every conceivable shape. He quickly lifted his hands and clasped his head tightly, then, turning, threw himself violently upon the pillow, tossing from side to side, groaning horribly. In his distress he cried aloud: "I've done it. I've done it. What shall I do! O, what shall I do!" Then, in a pitiful and pleading tone, he addressed his old slave: "Zeke, O, Zeke, don't tell. Don't tell it. I've done it, Zeke."

After a brief silence, save as his breath came thick and heavy, he screamed: "They'll get me! Save me. There they come." Then, before Isabel could prevent him, he leaped from his bed, and rushed madly across the room toward the door, with his head turned backward, as though to escape some one in pursuit.

"Uncle, uncle!" said Isabel, in a commanding voice, as she went quickly to where he had pressed

himself against the door in an attempt to open it and rush into the hall. "Uncle, what can the matter be? No one is after you. There is no one in the room but me. You have had a disagreeable dream. Come now, get back to bed, and be calm. Nobody will hurt you."

Isabel put her arm about her uncle's shoulders, as he stood leaning over tugging at the door knob. The touch of her arm was the climax of Arnold's fear; for at the contact he screamed in great fright: "Ugh, ugh, ugh! They've got me. They've got me. I'm caught at last. Zeke! Zeke! I told you not to tell."

"Who's got you, Uncle Gabriel?" asked Isabel in a steady, soothing tone. "It is I. Don't you know me? Is it Isabel—your niece. No one else is here."

"Isabel, Isabel, is it really you, my niece?" demanded Arnold, as he turned from the door, and grabbed her by the arms and shook her violently. "Is it you, Isabel? Where are they? Will they come again?"

"Whom do you mean, uncle?" asked Isabel, as she observed that he was fast regaining his composure. "There is no one in the room but me; nor has there been. Nobody is after you. What is the matter? You have had a horrible dream."

"Y-e-e-e-s, it was a bad dream—a very bad dream."

Arnold realized with embarrassment that he had dreamed, and in the dream had talked about the matter that had so disturbed his sleep; and won-

dered if he had said anything that was calculated to excite suspicion.

"What did you dream, Uncle Gabriel, that so frightened you?"

"It was a bad dream—a very bad dream," he repeated, feeling the horror. "Did you say they were not after me? Are you sure they were not here?"

"No one was here but me," replied Isabel, realizing that her uncle's mind was wandering, "and no one has been in the room since morning."

"Are you sure no one was after me, Isabel?"

"No, Uncle Gabriel, no one was after you; and no one has been after you. Who would wish to molest you, and for what reason would they come? Come, now, don't be alarmed about this again."

Though Isabel did her best to console him by making little of his dream, and though she knew dreams might arise from various causes and have no real significance, she could not dismiss the conviction that this disturbing experience had behind it something more than a disordered brain. She feared there had been some act committed that formed the reason for his peculiarities when awake, and restlessness when asleep. What it was she did not dare imagine.

Isabel led her uncle back to bed, but there seemed to be no rest for him. He sat up and looked around him in what seemed a dazed condition. His eyes were red and wild, and there was a nervous tremor in his voice.

"Lock the door and keep them out," he com-

manded. "Don't you hear them? They are out there now. They are trying to come in. They'll take me. O, lock the door. Quick—hurry—keep them out!"

To gratify her uncle, who she feared was fast becoming deranged, Isabel locked the door, and to secure it doubly she placed across it a heavy hickory bar, which had been used as a fastening since the boyhood of her uncle. Seeing the door locked and barred, he felt more composed, and dropped back on the pillow, sinking into a half-stupid, half-reflective mood—now disinclined to speak, except occasionally to break the silence by insisting that some one was coming.

After reassuring her uncle that no one would molest him, Isabel resumed her place at the window. Her brain was fairly awl with reflections. These were now not entirely of Leonidas, and the revelations in Uncle Zeke's cabin, but, in part, of her uncle, and the meaning of the strange talk during his sleep, and his even stranger conduct after awaking.

The thought of Leonidas was comforting to Isabel, for since going to Briarcrest her life had not been one of much joy. Her Uncle Gabriel and Aunt Betty had been so unkind that the poor girl's life was exceedingly unhappy. But since she had met Leonidas at the myrtle thicket, and more—since he had professed his love for her, life had been full of meaning and promise. It was, in fact, very different, but still sad.

It was not at all surprising that she spent her

moments of leisure meditating upon the new interest that had come into her life and permitting her thoughts to dwell at times upon Leonidas.

The thought of him gave constant delight, but the condition of her uncle, and the state of mind through which he was passing on account of the unknown trouble, alarmed her. She made repeated efforts to believe the dream had no meaning, calling to mind many of her own which had no bearing upon anything in her life that had gone before, or that had come after.

Her uncle now lay in an almost unconscious condition, breathing heavily.

Gabriel Arnold had been unkind to her, it was true, and she knew he had been wicked in a general way, but that he had been guilty of any overt act which could be the cause of such a distressing dream, she could scarcely think possible. The progress of the deed, judged by the dream, appeared to be the commission of an act, then a regret, afterward a fear. He had dreamed of striking some foreigner, upon whom a severe injury, if not death, had been inflicted. Then at seeing the result of his act he had groaned out his regret in the agony of repentance. Finally the fear of arrest seemed to have seized him and he had made a desperate effort to escape, and fancied his pursuers lingered about him long after he awoke.

As Isabel looked out of the window, longing for some diversion from harrowing thoughts, she observed in the sycamores a man leaning with his elbow against one of the trees which bordered the

lane on both sides. His head was resting against his hand. He was some distance away, and it was impossible to tell just who it might be. Her first thought, of course, was that it might be Leonidas, but then she decided this was improbable, as he would not likely stand there and run the risk of discovery, which he so much feared before leaving Uncle Zeke's. As she gazed longer she concluded that the man in the sycamores must be Leonidas, as his height and the color of his clothing corresponded exactly with those of her lover.

Presently a carriage passed the young man and approached Gabriel Arnold's house. As it did so he seemed surprised, left the tree against which he was standing, and looked after it as it went up the lane, and then disappeared in the pine woods on his right.

The carriage which had aroused Leonidas from his absorbing meditations contained Dr. Demster, who was on his way to visit the strange patient at Briarcrest. Accompanying the doctor was a young officer named Joel Vantine.

"O, Doctor, Doctor, I'm so glad you've come," cried Isabel, as the flea-bitten gray mare slowly jogged up to the stile in front of the Arnold homestead.

"What's the trouble?" asked the doctor, kindly, as he stepped from the carriage and looked steadfastly at Isabel. "Is your uncle worse?"

"Yes, worse in every way, and I am troubled about him."

When within the hall, and with the door closed

behind them, Isabel related the occurrence of the night before. She told him in detail how strangely her uncle had acted; and that he looked very much like a madman, meanwhile crying out and refusing to be assured of safety.

"Just as I feared," remarked the doctor, when Isabel had concluded.

"Do you think it was more than an ordinary dream, Doctor?" asked Isabel, fearfully.

"I am inclined to believe it was," the doctor thoughtfully remarked. "He evidently dreamed, and by it was greatly excited; but it was more than a dream when he leaped from the bed and ran across the floor to make his escape. It was then an hallucination; and the pursuit was as real to him as if officers of the law had broken into his room to take him away for the commission of some foul crime. Hallucinations of this kind are the result of cerebral derangement, and are common phenomena in cases of insanity."

"But do you think my uncle is insane?" asked Isabel, with horror in her voice and face.

"No, not yet," answered the doctor, slowly; "but I do not feel inclined to say that he will not be. He is certainly suffering from a great mental shock, and if relief cannot be given him his case will become serious."

"Do you really think he saw the men in pursuit of him? or may it not be that he only dreamed it?" asked Isabel.

"He thought he saw them," answered the doctor, "and you could not persuade him to the con-

trary. Like a man in delirium tremens, the object before his distorted imagination has the effect of being real. He actually believed he was being sought by unfriendly persons."

"Why were you not surprised at his condition, Doctor? You seem to have anticipated it."

"This was my fear when I first called," answered the doctor. "I then thought and I still think your uncle's trouble is more mental than physical."

"O, Doctor, do you think his mind will become deranged?" asked Isabel, becoming more and more concerned.

"I am not sure; but that he is under a great mental strain I am certain, and no one can tell what will be the outcome of it."

"Have you an idea what is the cause of this mental strain of which you speak?"

Isabel was determined to force the physician to speak freely to her.

"I, I hesitate to say, but—"

"Tell me the worst, Doctor. I must know."

"Your uncle is probably carrying, well—well—"

"Carrying what, Doctor?" persisted Isabel, with a pleading earnestness, fearing the old doctor would yet withhold the information. "I must know. Tell me all."

"Carrying some great secret, and fears a sudden disclosure," answered the doctor.

"O, Doctor, you alarm me by the suggestion. What is the nature of the secret?" asked Isabel. As she stammered out the question she leaned against the wall for support.

"I'm sure I do not know," replied the doctor, "but the conduct that you describe, and the nature of his talk during the strange spell, is suggestive, to say the least."

Isabel became so disturbed at this that Dr. Demster, fearing she might fall, supported her by placing his left hand against her shoulder, and with the right, taking her by the hand, led her across the hall, where she sat upon a chair and leaned against the balustrade.

"My child," continued the doctor, gently, "I am not certain; I only surmise. Your uncle's actions while in bed, and his first utterance, and the subsequent apparition, I fear, have some bearing upon the secret with which he is burdened. To my mind, the heavy blow he appeared to deal, accompanied by the words, 'There, you foreign devil; take that. You infernal Frenchman!' is very significant, indeed."

Isabel caught the doctor's meaning and by this she knew his opinion of her Uncle Gabriel. He needed not to say more, for she could now read his thought. He evidently believed her uncle was guilty of a grave offense. Could it be possible? And was she forced to believe it, whether she would or not?

"O, Doctor, Doctor! Do you mean it?" cried Isabel, loud enough to be heard by Arnold himself. "Is my uncle the guilty wretch you intimate?"

Gabriel Arnold, at this unguarded cry of his niece, again became alarmed. He leaped from the bed and paced about the room, maddened with

fear. Then he rushed to one corner, stooped close to the floor, with his face buried in his arms, shrieking:

"O, Isabel, Isabel! They are coming. They are coming back. They'll catch me. O! O!"

The peculiar sound of Arnold's cry, and the pleading tenderness with which he called her name, made Isabel forget herself for a time, and in a moment more she and the doctor had entered the room and were standing at the unhappy man's back. He pressed closely into the corner, to hide from his imaginary pursuers, looking over his shoulders as Isabel and the doctor approached.

"O, Isabel, Isabel! I'm so glad you've come," ejaculated Arnold, shudderingly. "Didn't you hear them? They have come back."

"No, uncle," answered Isabel, "it was the doctor and I talking in the hall. Here he is. Don't you recognize him? Look!"

As Dr. Demster looked into Gabriel Arnold's bewildered eyes he saw, back of them, a troubled soul. He also observed the old man's great frame shaking, from head to foot, though his own presence had somewhat quieted him. The doctor was more than ever convinced of the correctness of his diagnosis of the case, as he had given it to Isabel but a few moments before. He was thoroughly persuaded now, as he had not been during his first visit; thought, then suspicion was aroused that the patient was suffering from an incipient case of paresis occasioned by the commission of some act, the disclosure of which, might cause serious trouble.

Understanding the case so thoroughly, Dr. Demster knew just what treatment to employ to create a normal condition in the patient, and thus restore him to a rational state of mind. His presence always had a salutary effect, which unfortunately did not continue; for it was not long after his first visit that Arnold again became the inhuman brute he had been so often of late and then dropped back into a melancholy state of mind in which he was quite docile. Upon the slightest provocation at any time he would rage like a madman.

Arnold was soon induced to come out of the corner and return to bed. Dr. Demster, accompanied by Isabel, left the room to give the necessary directions for the treatment of her uncle.

"Doctor, do you entertain the same opinion of my uncle's case, now that you have seen him for yourself, or is it possible that you may have changed your mind? May you not have been mistaken?" questioned Isabel, eagerly, as the doctor stepped from the door.

"No, my dear girl; not mistaken," said the doctor, emphatically. "My mind is not changed; nor am I mistaken. There is no avoiding the fact that your uncle is in great distress of mind, and I fear I can guess his secret. I hope I am mistaken, but the chances are that I am right. Make the best of it, my child. I fear for the future of your uncle."

In a moment more Dr. Demster and Joel Vantine, who had remained in the carriage, were on their way down the sycamore lane at the speed of the old mare's customary jog, leaving Isabel stand-

ing upon the stile watching them sadly as the carriage moved slowly away.

Vantine could not resist the impulse to look through the small glass in the back curtain of the carriage to admire Isabel as she stood thus alone; and several times, while the view was unobstructed, he leaned half over the side in order to see her more plainly than was possible through the little curtain window.

Dr. Demster, though always in a thoughtful and serious mood, observing the young man's interest in Isabel, broke the silence by asking: "Have you seen Miss Proctor before? You seem to be interested in her."

"I have seen her once before," said Vantine. "She was then conversing with a black-haired chap—rather fine looking, I confess—and unless I'm greatly mistaken that fellow who stood against the tree, there, is the same lad. Interested? I should say I am. I don't know her, but I mean to scrape an acquaintance, and if that fellow is in the way—well—well—he'll have to get out of it—that's all. He has nice hair, and I admit is passably good looking; but you know these gray clothes, brass buttons and the gold lace on these sleeves are everything in a girl's eyes. Mark me! That girl will never turn down the uniform of a dashing Confederate officer, no matter what she may think of an ununiformed rival."

CHAPTER XIV

COUNT DE BUSSY

COUNT DE BUSSY was one of the favorites of Napoleon III, and was intimately associated with, and occupied an important place in the history of the foreign affairs of the Second French Empire. He was a descendant of one of the most ancient and honorable families of Lorraine. His father had been an ardent Bonapartist, and by his gallant services at Friedland, Luxembourg and Verdun had attracted the attention of the First Napoleon, who gave him honorable mention and granted him a liberal endowment. So loyal had he been to the great Emperor that he remained a Bonapartist under the Restoration regime, and afterward lived in exile until the Revolution of '30, when he again rendered heroic service as a general.

It was the elder de Bussy who, after passing through various campaigns, and receiving numerous wounds, followed the Emperor as far in his humiliation as he was permitted. His enforced parting from the man whom he considered his master was extremely pathetic. When Napoleon and his suite were ordered from the Bellerophon to the Northumberland de Bussy begged the privilege of accompanying him to St. Helena, offering to serve in the most menial capacity.

When delay was no longer tolerated he clung to the fallen Emperor's knees and wept like a child. As the Northumberland sailed toward the far-away prison island, and the Bellerophon bent her sails for Malta, he stood upon the deck, gazing through his tears, as he exclaimed:

"O that I might enjoy the honor of being a prisoner with the greatest and best of rulers! Have not I loved him as well as Bertrand, Montholon, Las Casas, or Gourgaud?"

It was not surprising that when the fortunes of Napoleon III changed, and he emerged from his exile and obscurity, his attention should have been drawn to the younger de Bussy, whose father had been so faithful to his illustrious uncle. When elected to the Presidency of the French Republic de Bussy was elected as one of his chief advisers, and in the transition period, when the government was passing from republic to empire, Napoleon sought the young man's counsel to aid in steering the unsteady ship of state, and through all the movements in its subsequent success he contributed considerably more than one man's share.

In the Italian campaign his service was conspicuously heroic. At the Bridge of the Buffalora, in the battle of Magenta, which was won and lost seven times in a single day, his heroism had much to do with turning the tide of battle and giving the victory at last to the army of the Emperor. At Solferino, where for sixteen hours the bloody contest raged, his services were no less valorous.

It was for his gallantry in these two decisive en-

gagements that Napoleon III constituted de Bussy a member of the Legion of Honor, and presented him publicly with the medal of the order. The medal bore upon one side a profile of the Emperor, and upon the other a short inscription which told of his bravery at Magenta and Solferino.

Count de Bussy was not only brave upon the field of battle, but he was wise in the council chamber as well. He was entrusted with the solution of many important questions of state, and proved himself to be one of the shrewdest diplomatists of the Empire, bringing to a happy culmination most of the negotiations undertaken during his incumbency.

When this illustrious Frenchman first made his appearance in Tidewater Virginia, many and various were the rumors concerning him. His visits in the beginning were only occasional, and no one knew whence he came or where he went. When it became noised abroad that the handsome foreigner was a French nobleman of high rank, many of the wiseacres shook their heads and ventured the opinion that he was a pretender, and that he was not in Tidewater for any good purpose.

This verdict was confirmed in the minds of not a few when it happened that the Count was paying attention to a daughter of one of the prosperous families. When the foreigner and Miss Marie Clendenning were one evening seen standing together upon the veranda of her father's home, admiring a century plant just about to bloom, the town folk then knew the Frenchman was not what

he was represented to be, and that his only purpose was to marry the rich man's daughter and in this way get possession of the father's wealth.

A more important rumor was quietly circulated, but failed to gain general credence. It was to the effect that the stranger was really a French nobleman, and that he was in Virginia attending to some state business of vital importance. It was believed, and had been for some time, that the Emperor of France was anxious for the recognition of the independence of the Confederacy, and it was thought that Count de Bussy was his representative to the President of the Confederate States; and that his visits to Tidewater were incidental.

Conjectures were abundant, but this much was known. A Frenchman, who claimed nothing for himself but for whom rumor claimed much, visited Tidewater Virginia, in 1861. He was tall, broad-shouldered and well-proportioned. In his walk he stepped with a steady tread and clearly showed the military bearing. His forehead was unusually high and broad, and his brow heavy. His face was clean-shaven, except for a tuft of beard near his ears. He wore a heavy coat, buttoned from the waist to the neck. This had a wide collar turned back, exposing a conspicuous black silk cloth, which was wrapped about his neck in such a fashion as to obscure completely his shirt bosom and white collar, though the latter article stood sufficiently high to touch his ears.

It was further known that the stranger made but few friends. Indeed, there was but one home he

ever visited. No one knew, though many imagined they knew, just why he spent so much time at the Clendennings'—whether it was merely to woo the beautiful daughter or if it had some political significance.

The matter, however, was soon settled. The careful and conservative Virginians of Tidewater were shocked at the announcement of the marriage of Count de Bussy and the young woman to whom he had been devoted. The family had been warned against the French pretender, but the wooing went on and the marriage took place. Notwithstanding the brief courtship and the sudden marriage there were those who believed that the Count had business to transact other than matrimony, and that sooner or later it would be known just what was his errand.

Count de Bussy vanished as suddenly as he had come. When he disappeared the town folk renewed their gossip concerning him. Many again insisted that he was a pretender; and that, now, having accomplished his purpose, he had gone without leaving any trace of his whereabouts. Others said he was suddenly summoned to France on important state business, and that he would soon return to complete the negotiations between President Davis and Napoleon III, but they thought it exceedingly strange that he should leave, even on such important business, without some intimation as to where he had gone. His young wife waited in sadness, but no tidings from the Count came to silence suspicion and to assure her of his fidelity.

CHAPTER XV

TWO SURPRISES

UNCLE ZEKE sat upon the side of his cot meditating upon recent events. How much had happened! It was past midnight, but the old man had not yet retired. There was nothing to prevent his going to bed, but he felt no desire to do so. His mind dwelt upon his master and what had happened on the "Dark Day," though he shuddered as he reflected upon it. Again, in fancy, he saw the ghost in the pine woods. Gradually his mind reverted to less horrible subjects, and he wondered if Leonidas had gone through the pines, and if he, too, had seen the ghost.

It was not these unpleasant reflections which had prevented Uncle Zeke from retiring. He had a presentiment that he ought to sit up. He wondered if it could be that Leonidas, or some friend of his, might need him. The old slave started suddenly, as he heard a rapping at the cabin door.

"I knows de meanin' ob dat—two loud raps, an' two easy uns; den, un moe loud un. Dat's Mars Lonny Darwood. I knows it, kaise dat's de kin' ob knocks dat he tol' me 'bout when he lef' hyar," said Zeke, jubilantly, as he hobbled toward the door. "Cum in, Mars Lonny,—I's bin 'speckin' yer dis long time. I jes knowd yer wus cumin' dis night. I's felt it in my ol' bones. Dat I did."

When the midnight visitor responded to the invitation, and stepped from the darkness into the dim light of Zeke's cabin, the old negro was startled to discover that it was not Leonidas. It was a stranger whom he had never seen before. He staggered back in the direction of the cot, trembling violently and his knees knocking together as he scanned more carefully the appearance of the untimely visitor. Recovering from his surprise and disappointment, and stepping closer to the stranger, the old man said:

"I hain't scyard,—no surree,—Zeke hain't scyard. I don't know yer, stranger. I's never seed yer befoe, but I knows yer's got sum word frum Mars Lonny Darwood. He tol' yer how ter knock at dat doe. Cum, stranger, tell ol' Zeke 'bout Mars Lonny."

The stranger was of medium height and rather stout, with broad shoulders. He was attired in a long loose garment, not a coat, buttoned from neck to skirt, and this reached nearly to the floor as he stood erect. It hung in irregular folds about his body, scarcely touching him except where it was bound by a leather belt buckled tightly about his waist. To this belt, on one side, a knife was fastened. He wore a high, broad-brimmed hat, made of soft material, and pulled far down, and his ears stood out at right angles from the sides of his head. His long jet black hair fell in ringlets; his whiskers, like his hair, were black and kinky, and were of that sort which turned toward the face after a short length and appeared to take root at the other

end. His complexion was unusually dark, and his eyes, set deep beneath heavy brows, were raven black.

Though Uncle Zeke declared he was not disconcerted, and that he knew somewhat of the stranger's mission, he was, nevertheless, greatly impressed with the man's striking appearance, and wondered if, after all, he might not be mistaken. If so, what could his errand be, and what could he do in the hands of such a man?

As Zeke eyed his visitor, a few points attracted his attention. He observed that, while the man's complexion was darker than that of many slaves, it was apparent that he was not a mulatto. He was not a negro, but a foreigner. This much Uncle Zeke was able to determine. He also discovered that the man's long garment had been torn in many places, chiefly about the neck, and was patched with cloth of a different color and texture, and on his temple, extending over his left eye, there was an ugly wound, not yet wholly healed.

Zeke, less confident than when the man entered, asked again with some hesitancy: "Who am yer, stranger? What yer cum fur? Did yer cum frum Mars Lonny Darwood? Whar's Mars Lonny, an' what he wants?"

"Him sent—Mine frind—me—him sent," said Ezra, the bear trainer, pointing first in the direction whence he came, then to himself.

Placing his hand in his bosom he took from it a letter, and handed it to Zeke, saying impressively: "Mine frind—sent letter—Isbel—take—

must know—take her letter. Mine frind well—me go. Me die for mine frind—save mine life.”

Ezra gesticulated extravagantly, and made a great effort to explain to Zeke that Leonidas had saved his life, and that in consequence he was ready to die for him. He pointed to the scar on his head, and exclaimed: “Mine frind—save life,—big bear—me die for him,—save life.”

Without another word Ezra passed impressively out of the cabin door and disappeared in the darkness.

Zeke did not understand all that Ezra meant. But he did grasp a part of his meaning, at least. He knew now that he was entrusted with a secret message to Isabel, and that at the earliest possible moment he must deliver it in person.

The next morning Isabel was sitting under the scuppernong arbor with a basin of cracked corn in her lap. The half-grown game chickens were running and jumping and flying about her feet, as Zeke limped to where she sat and touched her upon the arm.

“Missis Bel, hyars er letter frum Mars Lonny,” he whispered. “I knows yer wants ter read it. When yer’s read it let ol’ Zeke know ’bout Mars Lonny, kaise I’s ben er worryin’ an’ er dreamin’ ’bout ’im.”

Without asking how he had received the letter, with a glance of gratitude she ran eagerly down the sycamore lane, and turned into the pine woods, by the very path Leonidas had taken a short time before. Feeling the need of caution, she had placed

the letter under her apron, and did not remove it until she was out of sight of the house. When she reached the branch which runs through the pine woods, she sat under the tree where Leonidas had found the French medal, and after looking about began to read:

“DEEP CREEK, VA.

“MY DEAREST ISABEL: Events have taken a peculiar turn since I left Briarcrest, but I believe the hand of a gracious Providence is shaping my life. Many strange things have happened. I cannot write about all of them, but will tell you of them when I am so fortunate as to see you again.

“You will be interested to know that I have found a friend in Dr. Demster. He is a strange old man, and does not care for many people, but he has been very kind to me, and has made it possible for me to be self-supporting. I am attending to some of his lumber interests in the swamp, for which he is paying me generously. The doctor does not promise me anything for the future, except to be my friend, and he has asked me for my friendship.

“By the way, he told me about his visit to Briarcrest, and his impressions concerning your uncle's condition. If his opinion be correct, and the case turn out as he thinks, it will be fearful. But let us hope for the best, and trust he is mistaken. I have been forced to have my own opinion about it, too.

“I found in the woods, just where the path crosses the branch, a strange medal, which was owned by a French nobleman, and on which is a noted name

and date—the name of Count de Bussy and the date, 1859. But I will tell you more about it when I see you.

“The doctor has also told me of the young Confederate officer’s chance visit to Briarcrest, and how he was impressed with you as you stood upon the stile in front of the house. Did you know he was careful to watch you as long as he could, by leaning out of the carriage?

“Now, my dearest Isabel, don’t think I am uneasy or jealous. You have not told me yet that you love me, but I trust you do, and that when I see you again, you will tell me so, in the same unmistakable language in which my own love was expressed. It is quite natural that Vantine should admire you. It would surprise me if he did not. But, Isabel, I wish to caution you against this man. He means no good to me, and I am persuaded that he means none to you. I have been forced to count him as an enemy, and he will not scruple to do me the greatest injury. Be on your guard against him and give him no quarter, as he made his boast to Dr. Demster that you could not resist his uniform; and that if I were in the way of his suit he would dispose of me.

“Dearest Isabel, I love and trust you fully. Until we meet, good-bye. Yours, lovingly,

“LEONIDAS.

“P. S.—I will come to Briarcrest some time soon—probably in a few days. L.”

Isabel read the letter again and again, with varying emotions. The fact that Leonidas had found

a friend in Dr. Demster pleased her, while the repetition of the doctor's opinion of her uncle's case distressed her greatly. The reference to Vantine's visit produced a strange sensation. She hoped Leonidas might be mistaken in his opinion, but still she wondered what strange chance had brought the young Confederate across their pathway. The changing moods produced by the letter were all overshadowed by its short postscript. The prospect of seeing Leonidas in a short time delighted her so that even the reference to her uncle and the prospect of a probable interference on the part of Vantine, were powerless to depress her.

Isabel sat at the root of the tree with the letter lying upon the ground at her side. She was lost in thought, and perfectly oblivious to the surroundings, until she was aroused by the snapping of a twig. She knew the meaning of the sound, for it was exactly like the peculiar noise produced by her own tread upon a dry pine stick, as she had come into the woods. She arose quickly, and without pausing to learn the exact cause of the noise, started down the path to make her way back to the sycamore lane, leaving the letter lying on the ground.

"Excuse me, Miss Proctor," came a voice from behind her. "Here is your letter. You probably did not intend to leave it."

It was Vantine who spoke. He had seen Isabel as she passed into the woods, and had hastened to enter from another direction. He succeeded in reaching the tree under which she was sitting, without being observed. While she read the letter, he,

THE PINE WOODS AT BRIARCREST—THE LONELY PATH



too, had noted most of its contents, and had seen plainly the parts which referred to Gabriel Arnold, the French nobleman and himself. When he saw Isabel lay the letter down, and knew she was meditating upon its contents, he attracted her attention by snapping a dry stick.

Isabel was surprised and disturbed, but grasped the situation immediately, as she observed the young man in the uniform of a Confederate lieutenant. She knew it was Joel Vantine and recognized him as the officer who had accompanied Dr. Demster to Briarcrest.

"O!" exclaimed Isabel, tremblingly. "Thank you for calling my attention to the letter. It is from a friend, and it would surely look like carelessness to leave it here on the ground. I thank you, Mr. Vantine, most sincerely."

"Then, you know who I am?"

"Yes, I know you are an officer in the Confederate States Army, and I have lately learned your name," admitted Isabel.

"Then, I am sure you will hear what I have to say, when I tell you why I am here," continued Vantine.

"I wondered, when I saw you, just why you were here," answered Isabel, "and if you had just come when you trod on the stick, and spoke to me."

"I came to see you, Miss Proctor," said Vantine, hurriedly. "I have had something to say to you since I saw you standing on the stile and this is my first opportunity. I wish to say it now. Will you hear me?"

"But I must hasten back to the house," Isabel expostulated. "My uncle is not well, and I have been away too long already. You will excuse me, Mr. Vantine, I am sure."

"No, I'll not excuse you. You must hear me now," answered Vantine, in a very determined tone of voice, drawing nearer to where Isabel stood and endeavoring to take her by the hand.

Isabel now realized that she was powerless to withdraw at once and she determined to make the best of an unpleasant situation. To be alone in the woods with a man concerning whom she knew little, and that little unfavorable, was a very undesirable position. Moreover, he was the man about whom Leonidas entertained such serious suspicion.

"What have you to say to me, Mr. Vantine?" demanded Isabel, snatching away her hand, as she stepped back a pace from where the officer stood.

"Miss Proctor, don't be afraid of me," pleaded Vantine, with considerable tenderness in his voice. "I mean no harm to you, I vow. I mean only the best happiness for you. This is why I am here."

"What is it that you wish?" asked Isabel, realizing his meaning as she saw the suggestive expression of his eyes.

"It is needless to multiply words. I mean that I love you, and have waited for an opportunity to ask you to become my wife. I have made the opportunity, and I ask you now and here to marry me. What do you say? Will you have me?"

"I—I—I—why, Mr. Vantine, what did you say?"

"I ask you to become my wife," answered Van-

tine slowly, smiling at her agitation, "and I will be patient until you give me your answer."

"W—e—e—ll, it is hardly fair to insist upon an answer now," announced Isabel. "You took me so by surprise that I was not at all prepared for it. You greatly compliment me by wishing me to become your wife, but you know so serious a matter should be considered very carefully. I am not ready to answer."

"Miss Proctor, I love you," persisted the soldier, gazing into her eyes; "do you wish more than that?"

"No," replied Isabel, slowly; "I could ask no more of the man I marry. If a woman has a man's love, she has everything; but I am not ready to become your wife."

"Why can't you take me, and be mine?" urged Vantine. "What stands in the way? O, I think I know. Are you engaged to—to— that is rather a direct question, but are you not engaged to Leonidas Darwood? Have you told him you love him?"

The sound of Leonidas Darwood's name from the lips of the man whom he believed to be his enemy caused her to shudder and shrink away.

"No, I am not engaged to Leonidas Darwood, or to anyone else, but I am not ready to promise to become your wife. You do not know the conditions of my life or I am sure you would not ask me to marry you."

"I know more about your life than you imagine," responded Vantine, hoping to commit her to a fav-

orable answer at once. "I know your parents are dead, and that you are not happy with your uncle. Pardon me if I say also that I know you are poor."

"And still you wish me to become your wife?"

"Yes," the soldier answered, "I do. I wish to give you position in the world, and, as my prospects are very flattering, I am sure you could never regret becoming my wife."

"You are very kind to wish to change my position in life, but you must not insist further upon having my answer now, except to say that I am not ready to marry you."

"I understand," said he, beginning to grow impatient. "I see who stands in the way. It is Leonidas Darwood. I know more about this than you think. If only Leonidas Darwood stands in the way of you consenting to become my wife, consider which of us is more likely to put you in the world where you deserve to be. Leonidas Darwood has been driven from home. He is an outcast, and, to say the least, his future is rather uncertain; while my position is perfectly secure."

The soldier made the statement with evident pride, as he pointed to his gray uniform.

"Do you think that is certain?" asked Isabel, and Vantine saw by her countenance how much her question involved.

"Certain? Of course," said Vantine, emphatically; "as sure as the sun shines in the heavens. The Confederacy is sure to succeed. We will yet have our independence, and I have assurance from headquarters that I shall be a part of the regular estab-

ishment. Of course you know what that means.”

“I know, but upon what do you base your hope? Why do you think the Confederate States will gain their independence?”

Isabel was genuinely interested in the great conflict, and also was delighted with any turn in the conversation that would relieve her embarrassment.

“Have you not heard,” continued Vantine, “that our army is having great victories, and that many of the Northern people are in sympathy with our cause and declare the war to be unjust—that is, for the North? Then, the powerful nations of Europe also wish us well, and will soon recognize our independence. In England interest is at fever heat, and the great statesmen are watching the progress of our war, and are showing their preference for our side. Mr. Gladstone has just declared that Jefferson Davis is ‘the Creator of a Nation,’ while the famous John Bull Russell has written to the London Times that the defeat of the Northern Army at Fredericksburg was a memorable day in the decline and fall of the American Republic.’ ”

“The fact is,” went on Vantine, impressively, “the European nations are anxious for the success of our cause, as it means the dismemberment of the Union. They are jealous of the United States and its wonderful advancement, and would enjoy seeing two small nations rather than one powerful nation to dictate the policy of the world. Mark me, the plans for our recognition are all laid by several of the nations of Europe, but more particularly by France, and—”

"France," interrupted Isabel, quickly, "France! What about France?"

Recalling her uncle's dream to mind, the mention of France or Frenchmen excited Isabel, and she could not resist the impulse to break into his reasoning at this point.

"I suppose I am trusting you with some inside secrets," admitted the officer, reluctantly, "but Napoleon III, Emperor of France, has already sent a distinguished nobleman to Richmond to see President Davis in order to make the proper arrangements for our recognition."

"Who is this nobleman, and where is he now?" questioned Isabel.

"Count de Bussy," answered Vantine, "who became so distinguished in the Emperor's Italian campaign in 1859. He has now returned to France to report the negotiations which he has made; and when he comes to our country again, which will be soon, we shall be recognized and our independence assured." Continuing, Vantine added: "Miss Proctor, do you not see my flattering prospects?"

"How strange!" thought Isabel. "Count de Bussy! Count de Bussy! That is the name on the medal Leonidas found, probably on this very spot. How strange! How strange! Count de Bussy! What can it all mean?" She was lost in thought when Vantine spoke again:

"Miss Proctor, why are you so sad? And why do you still hesitate? I would be ever so patient if I but knew you preferred me to Leonidas Darwood."

"Mr. Vantine, you say Count de Bussy will soon come back?" asked Isabel, ignoring his plea.

"Of course he will come back, and that right soon," answered Vantine, feeling that if this fact could be established his success with Isabel was assured.

"O, I hope he will. I hope the Count will come back!" exclaimed Isabel, shaking her head, and turning quickly she left the young Confederate standing in the woods, looking in dismay at her retreating figure as it vanished along the path.

CHAPTER XVI

ISABEL'S INTEREST IN THE COUNT

AFTER the incident in the pine woods Isabel, for a time, felt relieved to have escaped from her unpleasant predicament. She nevertheless felt anxious to hear more of what Vantine might have to say regarding the mysterious Count, and what was proposed relative to the recognition of the Confederate Government by the European powers. More particularly was she concerned about his absence, and the probability of his speedy return to Virginia. The return of the Frenchman meant everything to her, even though it might not prove of vital importance to the Confederacy.

In her anxiety Isabel found herself longing to have the Confederate lieutenant come again to Briarcrest, even though his presence and his purpose were detestable. The knowledge that Count de Bussy was safe in France would drive many haunting fears from her troubled mind. She was desirous of hearing the news, even at the expense of suffering the embarrassment of coming into contact with Joel Vantine, the enemy of Leonidas. In fact she was not certain that her desire to see Vantine was not greater than to see Leonidas himself.

Several days after Isabel had left Vantine so abruptly, having a little respite from household

cares, she again walked down the sycamore lane and sat at the root of one of the large trees near the path that led through the woods to the right. She was careful to take a position so that a tree should stand between her and her uncle's house, but where she could plainly see the two approaches to the farm. She was expecting Leonidas, for it was now several days since he had said he would come. She was reading his letter, and had repeatedly scanned the postscript: "I will come to Briarcrest soon—probably in a few days." She wondered if he might not come while she waited; and if he did she was sure he would come down the path through the pines, for that was the way he had chosen before.

As Isabel sat dreaming and listening, with the letter at her side, she thought of the possibility of a strange coincidence. While thus reflecting she was startled by the tramping of a horse's feet in the pine woods not far away. She felt at once that it was not Leonidas, for he had no horse. It might be Vantine, for, as an officer in the Confederate cavalry, he must have a horse. She brushed her way through the honeysuckle and swamp laurel at the entrance to the path, and was soon in the woods to ascertain who was approaching.

Vantine had just dismounted, and was hitching his sorrel horse to a sapling, as Isabel emerged from the undergrowth.

"Are you here, Miss Proctor?" he asked, with glad surprise. "I came hoping I might see you, and here you are, not far from where you left me so

abruptly a few days ago. I'm glad to see you, and I'd rather see you here than anywhere else."

"I'm sorry I hurried off then," said Isabel, demurely, "for I have since regretted that I did not remain to hear more."

"O, I'm glad to know that your mind has changed concerning me. Are you now willing to hear me? May I tell you again that I love you?"

"Will you not tell me first about the prospects of which you spoke the other day?" asked Isabel, eluding his embrace. "I am anxious to know about that. After I left you I became more and more interested in that part of the conversation, and have been sorry that I was so hasty in leaving you. Will you believe me if I say I have been desirous to see you ever since?"

"You delight me, Miss Proctor, by saying that, and I am greatly pleased that you are so interested to know my prospects. I honor you the more for your caution. When I last saw you, I confess I showed my over-anxiety to win you; but while I am just as anxious now I prefer first to tell you about the bright outlook I have in the army of the Confederate States, if you desire to know."

Isabel wondered if it were right to lead Vantine on under a misapprehension, but still she felt that she must know something more concerning Count de Bussy, and Joel Vantine was the only man of her acquaintance who could tell her what she wished to know. Her intense desire for news from the Count was uppermost now. Incidentally, Isabel desired to know more about the mysterious foreigner's mis-

sion to the Confederate States; and as the young officer had the information she decided to induce him to confide in her, at the expense of hearing his protestations of love.

"Mr. Vantine, did you say that Count de Bussy has gone to France, and that he would soon return?" began Isabel, glancing at him. "The Count is still alive, isn't he, Mr. Vantine?"

"Alive! Alive! Certainly," said Vantine, quickly, in surprise. "Who says he is dead?"

Isabel realized that she had asked an unwise question, and that it excited not a little wonder in the mind of the soldier. With all the tact at her command she endeavored to divert the young man's attention from this particular point and elicit the information she desired by a less direct method.

"Why no one that I know of," answered Isabel, carelessly, "but as he has not been seen lately, and since he is charged with such grave responsibilities, I was fearful for him. That's all."

"I assure you that the Count is safe, and will soon return to Virginia and when he does, he will bring with him the proper recognition of the Confederate Government."

"I trust he may," said Isabel, with a sigh which indicated a fear that it might not be so.

"You seem to doubt the return of the Count, Miss Proctor. Why do you doubt it?"

"It means so much to you," responded Isabel with telling effect, "and so much more to me, that it seems too good to be true."

"You mean that our interests are identical," said

Vantine, joyfully, his eyes kindling with happiness. "I am so glad you think this. Do I understand you correctly, Miss Proctor?"

"I am greatly concerned for the Count—greatly concerned—and am much interested in his early return to Virginia," said Isabel, hastily. "Will you now tell me about the Count, and your prospects? I understand the mission of Count de Bussy has to do with the proper recognition of the Confederate States by France, and that your prospects depend upon the establishment of the Confederate Government. Are you quite sure it will come out as you desire?"

"There is no doubt about it," protested Vantine, confidently. "This is the way of it, Miss Proctor. You understand that the entire French nation is in sympathy with our cause, and that the Emperor and his ministers will soon recognize our independence. Count Mercier, the minister representing the French Empire at Washington, is decidedly favorable to us, and has advised Napoleon to interfere on our behalf by raising the blockade. Not long since he was in Richmond, and had several interviews with Mr. Benjamin. It was reported that he was looking after tobacco purchased by French citizens and held by the South, but that was only a ruse. We know he will meet Count de Bussy on his return and complete the negotiations for our independence.

"In addition to this, Count de Morny, who is the first man in the French Empire after the Emperor himself, told Mr. Rost, our former representative, and our present representative, Mr. Slidel,

has the assurance from the Emperor as well as from Count de Morny, that but a short time will elapse before the Confederate States Government will be as legitimate in the eyes of the nations as the United States Government now is. You may rest assured, Miss Proctor, that our future is now guaranteed."

"But suppose the Emperor fails to recognize the South?" inquired Isabel. "Is there not a suspicion that he is reckless in his promises? And may it not be that he hasn't so much interest in the South as he pretends to have?"

"His object, of course, is to break up the American Union," said Vantine. "This can only be done by lending his influence to establish the Confederacy. This much he is sure to do."

"Then why does he delay? If he wants to do it, why does he not do it at once?"

"It is said that he is waiting for General Lee to take Washington," answered Vantine; "but I am not sure that this is his reason."

"Then what?" demanded Isabel. "When General Lee marches his troops into the capital of the nation there will be little need for Napoleon to interfere. The South will then be recognized because it has conquered."

"Of course, the Emperor of France will not wait for this," Vantine answered, confidently. "There are certain questions of diplomacy which must be settled before the negotiations are complete, and that these are fairly begun, there is no doubt. These questions the Emperor has entrusted to

Count de Bussy, and when he returns all arrangements will be completed. Then we shall be an independent nation—the happiest people on earth. Miss Proctor, the thought inspires me.”

“But suppose the Count does not return, Mr. Vantine?”

Vantine could scarcely fail to perceive that this question was significant, and of paramount importance to Isabel. Her tone of voice, and the suggestive expression of her beautifully sad countenance, indicated that it was weighted with a meaning which he could not understand.

“But he will come back,” Vantine assured her quickly. “Why do you suspect that this trusted agent of the Emperor will not return? You seem to have grave fears about it. Will you tell me the reason?”

“We cannot always tell what might happen to a man,” replied Isabel, evasively, “and I was hoping that nothing had happened, or would happen, to prevent the Count’s returning. That’s all, Mr. Vantine.”

“If the Emperor fail to recognize us, and Count de Bussy should not come back,” said the soldier, recovering from a moment’s pause, “we will gain our independence anyway, for our army is being successful in the field and the Yankees will soon be driven over the line. They have had McDowell and McClellan, Hooker and Burnside, but they have all failed, and President Lincoln is in a quandary as to what to do. He has appointed General Meade, who attracted his attention at Freder-

icksburg when Burnside lost the battle, but it is not certain that he will continue in command.

"It is reported that Lincoln has his eye on a man in the West named Grant. Not much is known about him in the East, but he is stirring things out there, and is doing our cause more damage than any other general, or than all of them combined. I confess we are a little suspicious of him," continued Vantine, importantly, "as he seems to be the only one of their commanders who is having much success. We fear him, as he seems to have no failures at all. He has such a dogged persistence in his fighting, that we have reason to wish he was not a factor in the war. But if this man Grant come it will not affect the result, though he may change conditions somewhat. All their commanders combined would not be a match for our General Lee. I trust you believe this, Miss Proctor."

"Y—e—e—e—s," said Isabel, though her expression and tone belied the word, "but I should feel greatly relieved to know that Count de Bussy would soon return."

The young officer perceived that Isabel Proctor was not enthusiastic; but her admission that she believed in the success of the Confederacy, though it came with reluctance, furnished him with a reason to urge his suit as he had done when they met before.

"Then my prospects are pretty bright, aren't they, Miss Proctor? The authorities are already favoring me," said Vantine, pointing with pride, first to his sleeves, then to the collar of his coat. A few

days before the insignia on the soldier's sleeves had been wrought with a single strip of brilliant lace. Now the stripes were double; and on his collar triple bars of gold were seen instead of the twin bars of the lower grade. The lieutenant had been promoted to the rank of captain.

"Y—e—e—s, they are," admitted Isabel, abstractedly, looking about her as if she expected to see some one approaching.

"Then it's settled. You'll be mine. We can fix matters now," said Vantine, with genuine delight, as he stepped nearer to Isabel, and took both of her hands into his own.

The girl turned away for a moment, and the young Confederate realized there was no response to the emotions of his own heart. His love was evidently genuine and this lack of passion pained him. Her presence was charming to him; and her face inspired him to higher thoughts, but he desired some expression of pleasure at his touch. While Isabel hesitated, racking her brain for the best non-committal response to what had just been said, Vantine broke the silence.

"Do you still hesitate? Why do you turn from the man who loves you more than he loves his own life? Is it Leonidas Darwood, the outcast, that causes you to hesitate? If you have told him you will marry him can you not recall it? and should you not retract for your own good? What prospect has he, working in the swamp among criminals and negroes?"

"Now I am certain that you read my letter," ex-

claimed Isabel. "You have blundered in your attack on Mr. Darwood. It is a mistake, and the allusion in your last question is not gentlemanly, to say the least of it."

Vantine felt the stunning rebuke, and for a time did not know just how to meet it, but said finally: "Miss Proctor, you told me you were not engaged to Leonidas Darwood. Is this true?"

"It is true, and I am free to marry anybody or nobody, as I like; but it is certain that I will not marry you, with all your military finery and bright prospects," said Isabel, with cutting emphasis which caused the soldier to feel the conviction of her words. With a look of scorn she snatched away her hands from him, and ran down the path in the direction of the sycamore lane.

A crackling of sticks and the rustling of undergrowth indicated that some one else was not far away and the Captain for a moment, seemed startled, but looked about him to see who was approaching. He wondered if this could explain Isabel's sudden flight. The footsteps could now be distinctly heard, and the voice of a man was saying:

"This is the very spot."

CHAPTER XVII

THE RIVALS FACE TO FACE

IN a moment more, some one leaped over the stream just back of where the soldier stood. He turned, and Joel Vantine and Leonidas Darwood were face to face. Each was not a little surprised to see the other there and neither spoke at once. They seemed to be trying to adjust themselves to the peculiar situation.

"You are here according to promise, I see," said the soldier in rather a brusque manner. "Do you always meet her in the woods?"

"According to promise?" echoed Leonidas in an undertone, greatly surprised at the manner in which the soldier made the statement, and wondering how he could know that it was according to promise that he was at Briarcrest. "Yes, according to promise, but what do you know about it?"

This was indeed a question to Leonidas. He was perplexed to know just how Vantine should be aware of his promise to see Isabel. Had the soldier in some way intercepted his letter, and, by this means, secured the information? He was sure of its safe delivery to Zeke. The thought that the old slave had been intentionally unfaithful he would not entertain. But might Zeke not have lost the letter? If so, he had no way to communicate the fact. Had



LEONIDAS DARWOOD



Isabel been thrown with the soldier, and inadvertently given him the information? How could it have happened that his enemy should know of the promise to be at Briarcrest? And why should Vantine now be in the very way he would select to approach the farm? And, moreover, near the spot where the medal had been found?

"I know all about it," replied the soldier, in a louder and more insolent tone than before. "You promised to be here in a few days, and I'm glad to run across you. I want to settle a few things with you, and there is no better place than this, and no better time than now."

"I presume many strange things have occurred in these woods," said Leonidas, looking toward the pine under which he found the medal. "It is a pity that these trees and that stream can't talk. I have no doubt they could tell a strange story—one that would surprise and alarm you."

"Would it surprise and alarm you, too?" asked Vantine, in no little curiosity.

"It might alarm me," admitted Leonidas, "but I should not be much surprised. I should be expecting to hear startling things if these woods could talk. But what have you to settle with me?"

"It is you who have disturbed Miss Proctor's mind about the return of Count de Bussy. What did you mean when you said, 'If the case turn out as Dr. Demster thinks it will be fearful,' and that you were forced to have your own opinion of it, too? You are an alarmist, my dear fellow. What is your opinion worth, anyway?—and that medal,

belonging to Count de Bussy, where is it now? If I believed your story, I would demand to see it on the spot. Why do you not think the Count will come back?"

Leonidas was utterly dumfounded at this revelation, and scarcely knew what to reply. The soldier had gained information that was intended for no one save Isabel. Had Vantine read his letter? How had he secured it? Had Isabel, in an unguarded moment, revealed to him its confidences?

"I shall be glad if my impressions are not correct," said Leonidas, "but I fear the Count is not coming back."

"What do you know about his mission?" asked Vantine, with open impatience.

"I know what some people think about Napoleon's plan to recognize Confederate independence," answered Leonidas, "and that Count de Bussy was the commissioner sent to President Davis; and I also know there are those who think he has gone to France to report the negotiations, and that he will soon return to complete them, and you are among them, I presume."

"Don't you believe it?" asked the soldier, earnestly. "You seem to doubt it."

"Yes, I am compelled to believe he was an agent of the Emperor. Everything seems to point in that direction, but I confess I have my misgivings about his return. I think he would like to come back. He would desire to return to complete the work he has so well begun, but I fear he can't come back even though he wishes to do so."

"Will you tell me why?" demanded Vantine, sneeringly. "Has he displeased the Emperor, so that he has recalled him? I'm surprised that you have this opinion of so wise and good a man as the Count has shown himself to be."

"I should be glad if my suspicions are not correct," repeated Leonidas. "There is something strange about his disappearance. His young wife did not know when, or how he went, and she has been wandering around the country nearly crazed looking for him."

"O, that's easy to explain," said Vantine contemptuously, considering Leonidas stupid for not perceiving the reason for the Count's mysterious disappearance. "If the Count had informed anyone about the time and manner of his departure, it is more than probable that some one would have interfered with his plans. I suspect you remember the case of Mason and Slidel, the distinguished Confederate representatives to London and Paris, and how they were delayed and embarrassed by the interference of an officious Yankee captain. The Count, understanding how delicate his duties are, concealed the manner of his departure."

"We differ as to our opinion of the Count's return," persisted Leonidas, coolly. "This is a matter we are unable to settle. What is the next point of difference you wish to adjust?"

Leonidas paused for an answer, and wondered what it might prove to be, for he was now confident that Vantine was informed as to the contents of his letter to Isabel.

"I desire to settle the matter of Miss Proctor's preference," said Vantine, roughly, after some hesitancy.

"Miss Isabel Proctor alone can settle that matter," returned Leonidas with dignity. "How can you settle the preference of any young woman? Miss Proctor has the right of choice, and I don't see what either of us has to do with the matter of her choosing. I'm sure I'm willing that she should decide all matters for herself. What particular matter of preference do you mean?"

"You know what I mean," said Vantine in a rough, insolent tone, as he advanced a step nearer Leonidas. "You are aware that I admire Miss Proctor. I don't hesitate to say that I love her, and you think you stand in the way of my gaining her affection. I'm free to say that I fear this is true. If you would leave here and stay away forever, and refrain from your clandestine communications, there would be little or no doubt of my success, and——"

"My clandestine communications?" questioned Leonidas.

"Yes, your clandestine communications," roared Vantine. "You seem surprised, but you know you have written her a letter in which I am savagely attacked. You tried to arouse her suspicion concerning me and question my intentions concerning her. It's true that I mean no good to you, but it is not true concerning Miss Proctor. I mean all good to her, and I intend to put her in the position she deserves to occupy. What can she expect from you, who are an outcast, a common laborer in Dismal

Swamp? You depend upon Dr. Demster and you'll come to grief. That old chap knows how to take care of his gold."

"But Miss Proctor will have to decide as to who shall win for her a position in the world," responded Leonidas. "It is she who will say how her station is to be fixed. It will be neither you nor I."

"With you out of the way I am sure that she would decide in my favor," said the soldier, sharply, his face blazing with indignation.

"We differ again, Captain. I much prefer that she should decide this matter. If she prefer a soldier to an outcast, I shall be content. But in any event she will have to decide."

"Then you admit that you are a suitor?" demanded Vantine.

"It is evident that you read my letter," replied Leonidas. "I'm sure I don't know how you came by it, but I'm certain that you know what I wrote to Miss Proctor. I stated just what was in my heart then, and there has been no change since, so far as you are concerned."

"You did try to prejudice her against me, then?" rejoined Vantine.

"I warned her against you, I'll admit, as I shall do again when I am so fortunate as to see her. Your threat would justify this."

"I did threaten to put you out of the way, and I meant every word of it," said Vantine, flushing. He suddenly placed his hand roughly against young Darwood's shoulder and gave him a push backward.

Slowly, and with determined emphasis, as he re-

covered himself, Leonidas replied: "You are not worthy of so lovely a girl as I know Isabel Proctor to be. I repeat what I have——"

Before the declaration could be repeated, the young officer moved back quickly a pace or two, and then planting one foot before the other, drew his sword, and held it within an inch of his rival's breast.

"Say it again, and you're a dead man," he shouted. "I dare you, sir, to say it again. An out-cast swamp laborer shall never insult a Confederate captain a second time. Do you dare repeat it?"

"I repeat it," replied Leonidas, firmly, and quietly raising a hickory stick—the one used in killing the rattlesnake—he struck the sword well up the blade, sending the steel jingling through the pines and leaving only the hilt in the captain's hand. "I repeat it, sir. You are not worthy of Isabel Proctor."

Vantine realized his disadvantage in the sudden destruction of his weapon, and sprang at Leonidas with fingers aimed at his throat. In an instant the two men were engaged in a hand to hand encounter. Leonidas placed his hand in the collar of the soldier's coat, and, as if by magic, turned him half around, and drawing him over his hip dropped the officer on the ground, flat on his back. In an instant he was leaning over the prostrate form, and with one knee upon his breast, he said, "Captain Vantine, you are not worthy of Miss Proctor."

"Don't! Don't! For Heaven's sake don't, Leonidas!" cried a troubled voice that penetrated the

air and echoed through the pines. "Don't! For mercy's sake!"

Isabel had gone only a short distance, and had concealed herself in the undergrowth where she could see and hear all that passed between the two men. When she observed the anger in Vantine's face, and saw him draw his sword, and heard him threaten Leonidas, she became alarmed, and when the rivals were engaged in a close struggle, with one man beneath the other, she sprang from the undergrowth and ran to where they were struggling, crying, "Don't! For Heaven's sake don't! Do you mean to kill him?"

"No," retorted Leonidas, quickly, and turning, he was surprised to find it was Isabel who had spoken. "I don't mean to kill him, but I mean that he shall leave this place at once."

Addressing Vantine, who was still on the ground, Leonidas asked, "Are you ready to go?"

"A good soldier always knows when he is conquered," answered Vantine, reluctantly. "You're the conqueror, and I am ready to leave at your command. Let me up and I'll be off."

Leonidas rose from his bending position, and took his knee from Vantine's breast, bidding him stand, but still holding his coat.

"Will you go, and at once? But before you promise, we will refer the matter to Miss Proctor. She shall decide between us."

Turning to Isabel, Leonidas said: "One of us must go. Which shall it be? Must he go, or shall I?"

"O, Leonidas, don't leave me," exclaimed Isabel, imploringly, as she put her hands on his shoulder. "Don't leave me at the mercy of this man."

"Captain Vantine, you'll have to go," said Leonidas, slowly, but so firmly as to cause the soldier to feel the importance of an immediate decision. "Will you go without assistance?"

The Confederate was soon on his horse riding reluctantly away, muttering and scowling. As he disappeared down the path that led to the Gosport road, he cried:

"This is not settled yet."

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE VERY SPOT

WHEN the sound of the horse's hoofs had died away in the distance, Leonidas touched Isabel and beckoned her to follow. He led the way down to the branch and helped her across at the very place where he had leaped over a few days before. They stood in silence for a moment under a huge pine tree—the tree about which so much centered and the one that was destined to be of still greater interest to Isabel.

"This is an interesting spot to me," observed Leonidas, with an oppressive solemnity about his voice that increased the sadness of Isabel's heart.

"The place attracts me too, for it was here that I read your letter. I laid it down on the ground when I read it, and was thinking about you. Captain Vantine was concealed behind the tree and read the letter over my shoulder. I came here thinking I should be alone, and was surprised when he disclosed his presence and handed me the letter."

"Yes, you have a reason for remembering the place," admitted Leonidas, with some hesitancy, "but I fear there is a reason of more importance, that will make it of greater significance to both of us."

"What could mean more than your letter? And what is of more interest than the way in which Cap-

tain Vantine found out what you had written? I feel heartily ashamed that I was so careless."

Leonidas took from the inside pocket of his coat a small buckskin bag and extracted the medal.

"This is what gives the place such interest. I found it here. It is the medal of the French Legion of Honor and it belonged to Count de Bussy."

"I suppose when the Count returns from France," said Isabel, watching the face of her companion intently, "you will find some way to give it to him."

"Yes," replied Leonidas, "if he ever comes back, he can have it, but I fear he will never return to claim it."

"Why will he not come back?" inquired Isabel, anxiously, yet dreading his reply.

"I fear to tell you all I suspect," Leonidas answered, sadly.

"Tell me the worst, Leonidas," taking the medal in her hand and turning it over several times. "It was Count de Bussy's, for here's his name."

As the girl uttered the name of the French Count she looked pitifully at Leonidas, and overcome by suppressed fear sank at the root of the tree.

"It was the Count's——"

"Tell me the worst," Isabel insisted. "I must know."

"You have a right to know," answered Leonidas, "but can you hear it now?"

"Tell me," replied Isabel, feebly, "I can bear anything better than this torture."

"It's this way," began Leonidas. "This medal belonged to Count de Bussy up to the time of his

disappearance a short time ago. You know he has not been seen since the day of the eclipse. Upon that day I have reason to believe he was here, where now we are, and came to his death under this tree. There was a struggle, and in the struggle this medal was pulled from his breast and was overlooked. It was covered with pine needles and dirt, but I uncovered it accidentally and the finding of it has raised many questions and fears."

"He came to an untimely end? How did it occur?"

Isabel Proctor turned as pale as death, and her bloodless lips trembled, as she waited for an answer, fearing meanwhile she knew what the answer would be, and fearing too, what the answer might involve.

"I have every reason to think that Count de Busy was murdered right here," said Leonidas, "and that is the reason why the medal was on this spot."

"Murdered! Murdered!" gasped Isabel.

"Of course, I am not absolutely certain," said Leonidas, wishing to break the truth gently to her, "but I have every reason to think so. Uncle Zeke has strange feelings about this tree and stream, and declares he has seen a ghost here. He says, however, he never saw it before the day of the eclipse. On this account he urged me not to come into the woods, and became almost frantic when I smiled at the idea of seeing a ghost. Besides, here is a spot on the ribbon attached to this medal. Dr. Demster has examined it under a microscope and says it is a blood stain. He could not say definitely that

it was human blood, as human blood so closely resembles that of some of the lower animals, but the chances are that it is the blood of a man, and not of a beast, Isabel, I am persuaded that this spot of blood came from the Count's wound when he was murdered. And I suspect the whole truth will some day be known."

"I have tried to persuade myself that the Count would come back, but you think he has been murdered. May you not be mistaken?" implored Isabel.

"I may," admitted Leonidas, "but why—"

"The Confederacy, the Confederacy," gasped Isabel, hoping Leonidas would not suspect her of having any other reason.

"If the independence of the Confederacy depend upon the return of Count de Bussy, then the Confederacy is already doomed," responded Leonidas, "and it met its fate on this very spot."

"At whose hands? Who is the murderer of Count de Bussy, and the despoiler of our freedom?"

"Maybe, after all, the Confederacy will pull through, even if the Count has been murdered," answered Leonidas, evasively. "Let us hope for the best. I am sure it looks encouraging without the aid of France."

"Mr. Darwood, who murdered Count de Bussy?" Isabel demanded. "Who could have murdered him here on my Uncle Gabriel's farm?"

"I simply have an opinion," replied Leonidas, "and I trust I am mistaken. It is so easy to entertain a false notion that I am always willing to admit

that I am mistaken. My opinion may be all wrong, and I shall reserve it until I know more than I do at present. A train of circumstances seems to point the way to the murderer of the Count, but then circumstances are often deceptive and lead to wrong conclusions. I do not think it quite right to judge anyone from circumstances at any time. No, I don't know who murdered the Count, and from what information I have I'm unwilling to adjudge anyone guilty of the crime. I am willing now to say only that I am convinced of Count de Bussy's untimely death, and that he was murdered on this very spot."

"I must know, though I fear it may be the worst," said Isabel, in a trembling voice, the tears gathering and streaming down her face.

Though Isabel manifested great concern for the Confederacy Leonidas felt that there was something in her thought deeper even than this. Had it been for the Confederacy alone she was concerned her feeling would have been that of indignation, but she was not indignant. She was anxious, nervous, fearful and sad.

What was it that was affecting her so seriously? Was it that she knew of the death of Count de Bussy, and was sure he would not return? Was she convinced of his murder? And did she suspect who had slain him? Leonidas discerned the train of her reasoning, and followed it to its inevitable conclusion. He could readily understand the cause of her troubled mind. He made an effort to divert her attention.

"Come, Isabel," said Leonidas, with all the tenderness of a young lover, "let us think and talk about something more pleasant. I came to see you, not to make you unhappy; though I felt that you should know my opinion of the disappearance of Count de Bussy. I thought my coming would give you pleasure. Did you expect me? Is that why you were in the woods?"

CHAPTER XIX

LOVE-MAKING

Now that the time had come when Leonidas was again with Isabel he wondered if it were to be the glad hour that he had anticipated since she left him in Zeke's cabin the morning after the great storm. He had looked forward to the meeting with great pleasure; for he expected to reassure her of his devotion, and he dared to hope that there would be left no uncertainty as to hers. He remembered, however, that Isabel had never admitted her love for him. That she really loved him, he was confident, but that she would allow herself to express this emotion so soon he had grave doubts. Man-like, he did not realize that Isabel would have any scruples about revealing her feelings to him as plainly as he had done to her.

If suspense be suffering, Leonidas certainly suffered. There was a possibility that Isabel, on account of the very serious condition of her uncle's health and what had led to this state, might endeavor to place some barrier between them. Then the discovery of the medal and all that it implied might, in the eyes of Isabel, be deemed sufficient cause for denying her love and refusing to accept his. At any rate, if they remained on the very scene of the murder, Leonidas feared that it would be impossible to divert her mind from the horrible

tragedy, so he decided it would be wise to conclude their visit in some other part of the woods.

"Come, Isabel, let us leave this unhappy place. Cannot we talk of something more cheerful?"

Leonidas bent forward and took her by the hand, and their eyes met. He was confident that she could not misread the eloquence of his, but what was the meaning of hers? Their predominant expression was sadness, and this shone forth from a troubled soul. If love were there it was for the time obscured, and Leonidas could not detect its presence.

"I am ready to leave this horrid place," said Isabel, shuddering, and glancing about as she spoke.

Leonidas placed his hands beneath her elbows and fairly lifted her to her feet. The two went slowly down the path in the direction of the sycamore lane. They walked in silence to a spot where a dogwood tree and a swamp laurel intertwined their limbs across the way, just overhead. Here they paused, looking about them in every direction, and finally sat upon the body of a black gum tree which had been rolled from the undergrowth within a foot or two of the path. A moment passed before the silence was broken, and it might have been more protracted had not a red-bird, disturbed by their coming, jumped from the dogwood to the laurel, and thence to the ground. The bird was not frightened, for it hopped about and played in front of them, just across the path.

"How happy the bird seems," remarked Leonidas at last. "Nothing worries it. If a disturb-

ance is caused in one place it simply hops to another and forgets what aroused it."

"Yes," sighed Isabel, "a bird is always happy because it knows so little and remembers less. If we didn't know quite so much of what is going on, and could at desire forget the thing that happened yesterday, we might be happy, too. Knowledge is not always conducive to happiness."

"What knowledge have you that makes you so unhappy?"

"It may not be knowledge after all; it may be only belief. But, nevertheless, I am unhappy in it."

"What belief?" asked Leonidas.

"You have compelled me to believe that Count de Bussy is dead. I hoped he had only gone to France for a short time, as Captain Vantine said; but since you have shown me the medal, with its blood spot, I can no longer persuade myself to believe he is alive. To think he is dead, and that he was foully murdered here on my uncle's farm, is enough to make me worry; isn't it? If I could believe he is alive, it would be a tremendous relief to me, I assure you."

"He is not alive," said Leonidas with sad emphasis, "but can't you hope for the Confederacy even though the Count is dead? Surely all doesn't depend upon him."

Isabel remained in thought and Leonidas continued:

"Besides, has it occurred to you that though the Confederacy should gain its independence it might

soon meet with disaster? You know the war is being fought, not because of slavery, but because the right of the state to govern its own affairs is being questioned by the National Government. We claim that a state has the right to secede from the Union. Now, if that right is sustained by the issues of this war, then any state will have the same right to withdraw from the Confederacy. It is more than likely that something will occur to displease some state—say South Carolina—and this will cause another secession. Sentiment and common safety may hold us together for a time, but sentiment is not strong enough to bind us when the local interest of the state is involved. It is not at all certain that the individual states will surrender all their sovereign rights in order to maintain the Confederacy. I shall be sorry to see it, but I fear the Confederacy will go to pieces like a rope of sand.”

“Mr. Darwood, Mr. Darwood, the Confederacy is dear to me,” said Isabel, “and I pray that it will win in this conflict. I would give my life for it. But there is a matter that concerns me greatly now—if possible, more than the Confederacy; for I believe the Confederacy will, sooner or later, be established, permanently. There is a wrong which I fear can never be righted, and—”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Leonidas, fearing that he knew just what was troubling her. “Indeed! do you mind telling me what it is that so disturbs you?”

“I am not so much concerned about the fact of Count de Bussy’s death, unfortunate as that is, as I

am about the manner of his death," replied Isabel, sorrowfully. "To think he was murdered; and on my uncle's farm; and by whom? The thought overwhelms me, Leonidas, and I can't help it."

Leonidas now realized that unless a great effort were made to turn Isabel's thought into another channel she would think and talk of the murder of the unfortunate Count.

He moved closer to her side, and gently taking her right hand in his placing his left upon her shoulder. After a moment, during which neither spoke, he raised her hand, apparently without knowing it, and pressed it tightly to his breast, whispering, "Isabel, I love you." Without a word she turned toward him and looked into his eyes.

"I know you love me, Leonidas," Isabel answered, sadly, "but I am tempted to say I'm sorry it is true."

"Why, Isabel!" he exclaimed in surprised alarm; "why are you sorry that I love you?"

"On your account, not mine," responded Isabel, her tone of voice indicating a meaning that was deeper than the words.

So perplexed was Leonidas at this unexpected statement that he removed his hand from her shoulder, and turned half around to look her directly in the face, before he could determine how best to answer this amazing reason.

"Tell me what you mean, Isabel. I did not expect this when I came. I hoped you would be glad to see me, and that we should part with a perfect understanding. Tell me what you mean."

"To be candid," Isabel answered, firmly, "I mean that it is a great pity for you to love me, because you have shown yourself to be worthy of the best woman that lives and I am not fit for you. It is indeed a great pity. You should love some one whose love, if returned, would not embarrass you."

"You are worthy, dearest Isabel," exclaimed Leonidas in a tone of relief; for he realized that her sense of unworthiness arose only from her modesty and self-depreciation. "That matter was settled when I left home. Please don't think of it again."

"No," she protested, "I am not the person upon whom you should bestow your affection. Had you not better leave me now, and forever? I suggest this for your own good, not mine."

"O, Isabel, Isabel, I cannot bear to hear this from your lips!" exclaimed Leonidas, sadly. "You should not say such words. Do not bid me, for I will not go."

"No, I do not bid you to leave me, Leonidas, but I am sure it would be far better for you should you do so."

"How strangely you talk, dearest," answered Leonidas. "Do you not know that I love you, and that it would break my heart and blight my life forever if you sent me away?"

"Could you not soon forget me? Many a man has loved a woman truly, and protested as you do now, but when the separation came, the wound was soon healed, and they were both happy."

"Would you be happy in such a case, Isabel?"

"Happy! No. I may never be happy again," re-

plied Isabel, "and it is for this reason that I think it better for you to leave me. It is not well for a noble life like yours to be blighted by an unfortunate alliance with an unhappy woman. I am not willing that it should be so. It is enough that one of us should be doomed to perpetual unhappiness in this life. I confess I am unhappy, and I fear I shall never be otherwise."

"But, Isabel, listen to me," insisted Leonidas. "I love you, and would give my life for you. Are you not willing that I should make your life happy? Is it no comfort that I love you?"

"Leonidas, I know you love me. You have shown it in many ways. But be patient and hear what I say. You will be far better off not to love me. I am a very unfortunate girl."

"What do you mean? What do you mean, Isabel?"

"My Uncle Ga—," gasped Isabel. "My Uncle Gabriel. Don't you understand?"

"But you may be happy in spite of him, if you only will."

"Not in spite of him. My uncle, my Uncle Gabriel," repeated Isabel, feebly, stopping abruptly lest she might betray too much feeling and communicate more to Leonidas than was necessary.

"Listen to me, Isabel. I know something of your uncle. I know he dislikes the idea of my coming to Briarcrest to see you or Uncle Zeke. Indeed, from what you heard between him and the strange man, who is no other than Jack Mobaly, it is clear that the two men are plotting against me. If they

could they would run me off into the swamp and hold me there until I promise to leave Tidewater never to return. I don't fear them, though. Don't let your uncle's feeling toward me cause you any sadness or make you feel that you are so unfortunate."

"Yes, my uncle hates you," admitted Isabel, "and I fear, with that vile man, is plotting your ruin. But if you cease to pay attention to me, and keep away from here, he will not have the same reason to do you an injury. Do you not think I am wise? Isn't it better for you not to love a girl who is the niece of such a wicked man?"

"You are not responsible for the conduct of your uncle, and should not be compelled to suffer for anything he does. No matter how wicked he is it will not change my love for you. Believe me, Isabel. I will love and cherish you, no matter what your uncle is."

"But you speak unadvisedly," expostulated Isabel. "You don't know how wicked he is, and what he has done, and what he may do in the future. Suppose he should bring disgrace on his name; do you not see how unfortunate it would be that you ever loved me? Suppose my uncle should have taken human life; what then?"

"Still I say, you should not be made to suffer for the sins of your uncle," replied Leonidas, firmly and emphatically.

"But that is not the way with society. You know I should be discounted forever in social life on my uncle's account."

"True, but I'm at variance with society in that particular, as you know. I love and honor you; and honor you the more for raising the question. But will you not dismiss it, and never raise it again?"

"You are generous, and hot-headed, Leonidas, but I still say it is not right for a young man to blight his life and ruin his prospects by an alliance with a girl who is disgraced. Is it?"

"I can answer you, Isabel, if I but know but one thing."

"Well, what is the one thing you wish to know?" asked Isabel, falteringly. "What is the one point upon which so much depends?"

"Does the unfortunate girl love the young man who proposes to become a martyr for her sake?" questioned Leonidas. "This is the one thing I should like to know."

"Suppose she does," responded Isabel in a whisper, still keeping her eyes turned down.

"Isabel, do you love me? Tell me: do you love me?"

"Y-e-e-s," she breathed, softly, as Leonidas drew her into his arms and kissed her gently.

They sat in silence a few minutes, and at length he glanced down into her beautiful face as she turned her head upward and met his gaze.

"You'll forgive me, won't you, Isabel?"

"You are forgiven, Leonidas. You were forgiven before you did it," she whispered.

Isabel presently realized for the first time since coming into the woods that it was getting late, and that she must return to the house. The meeting

with Vantine, the interest excited by the disappearance of Count de Bussy and the speculations concerning his return, together with the doubtful prospects of the Confederacy, had been so painfully engrossing to her that she had forgotten how the hours had slipped away. Then the coming of Leonidas upon the scene, and his encounter with the soldier, and what followed when she was alone with the man she loved, had caused her to be totally oblivious to time.

They arose to depart and stood facing each other. Leonidas took Isabel's face between his hands, and holding it for a moment bent over until their lips met.

CHAPTER XX

THE STRANGE WOMAN.

WHO is coming?" asked Isabel, softly. "It's a woman, and how strange she looks! What can she want in these lonely woods? Besides, it is nearly night. See what she wants, Leonidas. The poor thing may have lost her way. She looks frightened. I pity her, for she seems to be unhappy."

They had walked slowly together toward the edge of the pines, where Leonidas would be concealed from view and still be able to see Isabel until she had entered the house. They had at last spoken their word of farewell, and had just arranged the time when they should meet again, when their attention was attracted to some one approaching through the woods. As the woman came nearer Leonidas thought he recognized her as some one he had seen before.

"Her face is familiar, but I cannot place her," said Leonidas, turning to Isabel, and speaking in an undertone.

"But where did you see her?" asked Isabel, quickly, before the woman came near enough to hear what was being said.

"At the Creek, the evening after the big storm. She looked wild and anxious then, and she appears to be so now. I'm sure it is the same woman. See how she is looking around in every direction.

She did that at the Creek also, and seemed to look from one person to another as quickly as possible. I am sure she was searching for some one. It is true I was busy with the bear, but still I could not help noticing the woman. And it just occurs to me who she is."

"Who?" questioned Isabel, but the woman was now too near for Leonidas to answer.

There had been a well-dressed woman at Deep Creek the day the market folk from Carolina had crowded the village. She stood on the edge of the company and had witnessed the struggle in which Ezra was rescued from the bear. Her peculiar unrest and the ever-searching gaze had attracted attention. It was she whom Jack Mobaly had brushed roughly aside when he disappeared after his cruel act. Leonidas, of course, never expected to see her again, but he was sure that this was the woman. She came nearer, and Leonidas said:

"Madam, have you lost your way? Can we help you? We are at your service, if you need our assistance. Are you looking for some one?"

As they waited for an answer Leonidas realized that he might have known that she was not one of the market folk because she was so much better attired. He was satisfied that her presence there at that time was of unusual import, though no one seemed to know anything regarding her.

"O, that I might find him! That I might find!" she cried, wringing her hands frantically. "Can you tell me where he is?"

"Whom do you seek?" asked Leonidas.

"Count de Bussy! Count de Bussy!" cried the woman. "I seek my husband, Count de Bussy!"

She paused for a moment, and looked around in a dazed manner before speaking again. Her speech was incoherent, but eloquent with sadness.

"My husband, the Count—he is gone. I can't find him. I've looked everywhere. Nobody knows. He's gone. They said he wasn't good—that he was a pretender. But it isn't true. He was a Count—belonged to the Legion of Honor. He had the medal with his name on it, and papers in his pocket. He was a Count; Napoleon sent him. He went to President Davis and Mercier. He is gone and doesn't come back. Have you seen him? They say he came into the woods, and he has not been seen since. They tell me he has gone to France, and will soon come back. He could not do so. Those wicked men won't let him come back to me. The Count; have you seen him? Have you seen the Count?"

The rehearsal of this weird story of the strange woman excited Isabel intensely, and disturbed Leonidas not a little. The reference to Napoleon and the paper prompted him to ask: "Did you say that Napoleon sent him? And that he had papers in his pockets?"

"Sent him to President Davis," said the woman. "The papers told him what to do."

"Do you remember what he was to do?"

She broke into a flood of grief, and soon became hysterical, alternating between weeping and laughing. Presently she screamed: "The Count! The

Count! To break the Union—to set the Confederacy free.”

The woman suddenly dashed through the woods in the way she had come. As the hour would admit of no more delay Leonidas and Isabel parted too, with a promise to meet at the gum log on the afternoon of the next day.

CHAPTER XXI

A PLOT DISCLOSED

"JES yer wait er minit, Mars Lonny," shouted Zeke, as the signal knocks were distinctly heard on the cabin door, "I knows dat's yer, Mars Lonny, but Zeke kain't hurry, kaise I's got de rumatiz an' I's 'mos dead. Wait er minit, Mars Lonny, I's 'mos dar."

The old slave hobbled across the room and threw the door open. Leonidas stepped in and quickly closed it. He had spent the early part of the evening in the pine woods, and at sunset hurried off to Zeke's cabin to spend an hour or two with his old friend before making his way back to the Creek.

"Well, Uncle Zeke," began Leonidas, "I have had several adventures since I saw you. The man I sent with the letter is now my friend, and Dr. Demster has almost adopted me."

"Mars Lonny," said Zeke, "I wants ter hyar 'bout dat sum udder time. I's got sumthin' fer ter tell yer, dat I wants yer ter hyar, chile. I's bin dyin' ter see yer sence las' night. I's bin right smart an' scyard—deed I has."

"What have you to tell me, Uncle Zeke? Something more about that ghost down by the branch in the pine woods?"

"No, Mars Lonny," replied Zeke, hurriedly, "I's got sumthin' else fur ter tell yer now. I's gwine

ter tell yer 'bout dat ghost sum udder time. Zeke hain't gwine ter live long, Mars Lonny. I feels right lak gwine into de big ribber sumtimes, an' befoe I dize I's got sumthin' ter tell, an' it's 'bout dat ghost what I seed down dar in dat pine woods; but dat hain't what I wants ter tell yer now."

Leonidas observed that Uncle Zeke was becoming agitated, just as was the case when he had first related the story of the ghost, and it was apparent that the old man was now showing quite as much interest as when he pleaded with him not to go into the pine woods.

"What is the other matter that concerns you so much?"

"Mars Lonny," said Zeke, "I wants ter tell yer dat Mars Gabel Arnold knows dat yer bin hyar, an' he's mighty mad an' scyard 'bout it too. I tells yer he don't want yer ter cum round hyar. I jes think he's gwine ter do sumthin' weeked ter yer ef he gits er chance. So I wants ter tell yer, an' yer kin jes keep out'n his way. He an' dat strange man is watchin' fur yer all de time. Da am bofe so bad dat da am mean enuff ter kill yer or take yer off ter de swamp. Look out fur um, Mars Lonny, I ax yer."

"Why do you think all this, Uncle Zeke?" asked Leonidas with some degree of concern, for this only confirmed what Isabel had intimated and the opinion she had expressed on the morning after the great storm.

"Now hyar Zeke, an' he's gwine fur ter tell yer. I hyard Mars Gabel Arnold an' dat strange man,

what cums hyar nights, talkin'. Da had dar heads close togedder, an' da thought nobody didn't hyar um, but ol' Zeke hyard um all de same. I hyard all da sed. 'Deed I did. I hyard every word da sed. I's bin scyard an' mighty worried ebber sence, I tells yer. Zeke didn't sleep las' night, an' he wouldn't sleep ter night nuther, Mars Lonny, ef yer hadn't cum hyar. Now yer am hyar ol' Zeke's right smart an' easy, kaise da kain't git yer now. No, da kain't git yer."

"Can't get me? What do you mean, Uncle Zeke? You surely have been dreaming. You don't think the patroles will trouble me."

"No, Mars Lonny, de patterroles ketches de black fokes. Hain't yer hyard um say 'run, nigger, run, de patterroles will ketch yer'? Ye hain't black an' de patterroles hain't gwine ter ketch yer kaise yer hain't black, but Zeke's mighty fyard, doe, sum body else will."

"Nonsense," interrupted Leonidas; "who will catch me?"

"I's gwine ter tell yer, Mars Lonny," said Zeke, with a touch of impatience in his tone. "I's gwine ter tell yer. As I wus sayin', I hyard Mars Gabel an' dat strange man er talkin'. Deed I did, Mars Lonny. Now yer pay 'tention ter ol' Zeke, fur unce. I's afyard yer didn't do dat t'other day, an' I's afyard yer went in dat pine woods whar I tol' yer I seed dat ghost. Now didn't yer?"

"Go on, Uncle Zeke; I am anxious to hear what you have to say about Mr. Arnold and the strange man," answered Leonidas, ignoring the question.

"Mars Lonny, I went down towards de barn las' night, jes fur a leetle walk. I's mighty krippled up wid rumatiz, but I felt right lak I ought ter go down dat way. Yer knows yer habs dem feelings, an' yer kain't 'splain um—no, yer kain't 'splain um. Well, dats de kin' ob feelins dat I had den. So I tuck myself, an' hobbled down in de 'rection ob de barn, as I wus er tellin' yer. I didn't know but sumthin' might be de matter wid Club Foot, or de chickens, or sumthin' else might be de matter. I jes didn't know jes why I went, but I went, Mars Lonny, enyway, an' I's so glad I went. 'Deed I is, Mars Lonny, I's glad I went. Well, as I was er tellin' yer, I went down dat way, an' when I got jam by de cabin whar ol' Pompey uster stay I jes couldn't go no funder, an' I went in de cabin, kaise de doe wus open, an' I sot down on de floe. When I wus sot down I hyard sum un talkin'. 'Deed I did, Mars Lonny, I hyard sum un talkin'. I jes couldn't hep it, but I hyard what da sed."

"Did they talk about me?" asked Leonidas, and the old slave could discern a somewhat anxious tone in his voice.

"Yes, Mars Lonny, da talked 'bout yer," said Zeke, impressively; "dat's what I wants ter tell yer."

"Could you see the men, as well as hear them?"

"Yes surree; dat I could. Da wus standin' under de big tree, 'cross de driveway ober frum ol' Pompey's cabin, an' I wus sittin' down on de cabin floe right lak I tells yer. De moon wus shinin', an' I could see de men, but da couldn't see ol' Zeke."

"How do you know they couldn't see you, Uncle Zeke?"

"Now, Mars Lonny, yer knows dat ef da had seed ol' Zeke, da wouldn't talk lak da did," answered the old man with conviction, "fur I could hyar every word da sed. Now yer knows, Mars Lonny, da wouldn't sed what da did, knowin' Zeke could hyar um."

"What did they say, Uncle Zeke?" asked Leonidas, with a little impatience at the old man's delay.

"Da sed yer wus in de way, an' Mars Gabel sed yer knowd too much ter sute 'im, an' sho' as yer libs, Mars Lonny, dem men means ter do sumthin' bad ter yer. Un ob de men sed, les kill im an' sink im in de branch,' but Mars Gabel sed 'No,' an' den he ax'd dat strange man ter take yer off ter de swamp whar he stays at in de da' time. Mars Gabel didn't want fur ter kill yer, an' sink yer in de branch, kaise he's got 'nuff ob dat branch. Dat branch dun bin monstus sight ob trouble ter Mars Gabel, an' he don't neber want ter see dat branch ergin. Dat tother man sed he wus ready ter kill yer. He sed he would kill yer, or take—"

"But, Uncle Zeke, do you mean there were three men?" asked Leonidas in excitement. "I thought there were but two—one Arnold, and the other Jack Mobaly, who is mean enough for anything. Who could the third man be?"

"I don't know who dat man wus," said Zeke, "but he wus a soger-man, kaise I could tell by de coat an' de buttons he had on 'im."

"A soldier-man! A soldier-man!" said Leonidas, apparently surprised. "I see and understand it all now. I know why Mr. Arnold wishes me out of his way, and I know why the soldier-man would like to have me either in the branch or in the swamp; and that man Mobaly, he is in for anything that is wicked. He will do Gabriel Arnold's bidding for a very small price. I see now what I have to face, Uncle Zeke, and I will do my best to be ready for it. My first effort will be to avoid them; the next to be prepared to defend myself should I encounter them."

"Mars Lonny, keep 'way frum dem men," said Zeke, with emphasis, "kaise da means ter kill yer ef da kain't do no better. Frum what da sed, de sogerman an' de strange man what cums hyar nights wouldn't min' killin' ob yer, but Mars Gabel don't want ter kill yer. He wants yer tuck ter de swamp an' kep' whar dat strange man libs. Keep 'way frum dem weeked men, Mars Lonny, I ax yer."

Here was a deep-laid scheme on the part of these three men—Arnold, Mobaly and Vantine—to dispose of Leonidas in some way. The motive was clearly to be seen. It was the night before the meeting in the woods with the soldier that Vantine had entered the plot to destroy or abduct him, and in the light of this disclosure it was now evident what his purpose was, when he drew his sword, and in his desperation had endeavored to choke his adversary. The conviction was now growing upon Leonidas that the Confederate officer was not at this time far away, and that he might expect an attack

any moment. He remembered that the last he heard from him, as his horse galloped away, was, "This is not settled yet;" and now it began to dawn upon him that the encounter between him and Vantine in the woods might have a serious sequel.

"What was the last thing you heard the men say?" asked Leonidas, "and what became of them afterward?"

Leonidas felt that if they had agreed upon a plan of action, he might, in a measure, anticipate what they were intending to do, and hence prepare himself to avoid the emergency that might otherwise arise. Though he was a vigorous young man, and felt that he was equal to either of these men where no advantage was manifest, still he shrank from an encounter with all of them at once; for he knew, with their wicked design in mind, and the preparation they were sure to make, it would be difficult to tell the immediate result of a conflict.

"De las' I hyard dem men say wus dis," said Zeke: "Mars Gabel sed, 'Now, boys, I 'pends on yer ter do dis job. Yer knows I's ol' an' feeble, an' kain't hep yer. So yer jes take dat young debel off ter de swamp.' When Mars Gabel tol' de two men dat he lef um an' went back ter de house. Dis is egzackly right lak I tells yer, Mars Lonny. Da means ter take yer ter de Dismal Swamp, ef da kin git holt ob yer."

"But what became of the other two men?"

"Da talked sum moe befoe da went," replied Zeke, quickly.

"What did the soldier say?"

"Don't yer know, Mars Lonny, dat weeked man sed dat he wants Missis Bel, an' ef yer wus out'n de way she'd hab him. La sakes, Mars Lonny, Missis Bel hain't gwine ter hab 'im no way. She hain't gwine ter hab nobody ceps yer. 'Deed she hain't. But de soger-man sed yer had ter git out'n his way, an' dat dis wus his chance, an' it didn't make no diffurence ter him ef da dropped yer in de ribber. De strange man what cums hyar nights sed da wouldn't kill yer, nor put yer in de ribber. He sed da would do right lak Mars Gabel ax'd dem ter do. Den he sed Mars Gabel paid 'im fur de job. Jes think ob dat, Mars Lonny. Now dat wus all da sed, but wusn't dat weeked? I wushed ol' Zeke wus young ergin, an' didn't hab dis rumatiz. He'd show dem men sumthin'. Dat he would, Mars Lonny; didn't Zeke tell yer dat Mars Gabel Arnold wus er mighty bad man, an' yer jest thot he wusn't so bad."

"But what became of the two men?" Leonidas asked again.

"Da went into de pine woods in de 'rection ob de branch," said Zeke, with much nervousness, "an' da didn't stay dar long, I knows, kaise da must er seed dat ghost what I's bin tellin' yer 'bout."

Uncle Zeke paused for a time, and glanced around with great uneasiness. He first looked at the door, and then at Leonidas. He hobbled closer to where Leonidas was standing, and, grasping him by the arm, looked up anxiously into his face, saying in a whisper, "Mars Lonny, did yer hyar dat noise?"

CHAPTER XXII

AN EXCITING NIGHT

LEONIDAS listened for what had disturbed Uncle Zeke, and detected the sound of muffled voices which seemed to move about the cabin. Presently the old man asked again, with more animation than before, "Mars Lonny, did yer hyar dat noise?"

"Yes, Uncle Zeke, I heard it, and it sounds ominous."

"What yer means by dat, Mars Lonny?" asked Zeke, as he looked anxiously into young Darwood's face, and grasped him tightly by the arm. "Wh—a—a—a—a—t yer means by dat?"

"I mean that the sound is suspicious, and has no good in it for either you or me."

"It's dem weeked men cum ter git yer, Mars Lonny," announced Zeke, excitedly, beginning to move nervously about the room.

Leonidas realized fully that Uncle Zeke's fears were well founded, and that all circumstances indicated a speedy contest with his enemies; for he distinctly heard one of the men, whose voice he recognized as that of Vantine, say: "Revenge is sweet, and I'll have mine soon. He's here, and I know it."

Uncle Zeke now became thoroughly frightened; for he knew these men were bent on carrying out their design. Looking more anxiously into his

face, still holding Leonidas by the arm with one hand and pointing in the direction of the back door of the cabin with the other, the old man quickly said:

"Run out'n de back doe, an' lebe ol' Zeke hyar ter hissef. Ef da kills Zeke it don't matter much, as I's not gwine ter lib long, no how. Run, Mars Lonny, run fur yer life. Git out'n dar way. Fool um jes dis unce. Fool um, Mars Lonny, fur Zeke's sake, fool um."

"Uncle Zeke, I'll never leave you while there is danger."

"But da'll git yer, Mars Lonny, da'll git yer. Run, quick, Mars Lonny; run," he pleaded.

"No, I'll not run," answered Leonidas, with deliberation; "I'll stay by you, and not leave until I am forced to go."

In another moment there was a tremendous thump, and the cabin door was burst in, splinters flying in every direction. Jack Mobaly and Vantine quickly approached Leonidas and Zeke, and before many words could be spoken Mobaly had thrown Uncle Zeke roughly into the corner. Vantine covered Leonidas with a revolver, saying:

"Move, and I'll blow your infernal brains out on the spot." Vantine's voice was subdued, but determined, and his teeth were grinding tightly together with suppressed passion. He continued with a sneer of sarcasm: "Mr. Darwood, you had your innings in the pine woods to-day. It's my turn now. There you were the victor, and I was vanquished. I knew it, and admitted it. Now the

advantage is on my side, and I'll dictate terms. You'll surrender, won't you?"

"Captain Vantine—"

"Don't you speak another word, or you'll drop in your tracks," repeated Vantine, with a pronounced emphasis. "I'll hear nothing from you. You are in my way, and this is my chance. You shall go where I'll not be annoyed by you again for some time. Mobaly and I will attend to your case, and we will have no words from you."

"I would rather die than suffer indignity at the hands of these men," said Leonidas, mentally, realizing his embarrassing plight. Then, forgetting for a moment his perilous position, he said aloud:

"Isabel! Isabel!"

"Don't profane her name in my presence," shouted Vantine, and as quick as thought he touched the trigger of his pistol, sending a bullet whizzing by young Darwood's head.

While Joel Vantine was making the most of his advantage over Leonidas, Jack Mobaly had thrown Uncle Zeke into a heap in a corner of the cabin. Then, placing the old man's hands between his knees, he tied them fast together, until the rope cut deep into the flesh. To prevent his making an outcry, even after they should be gone, Mobaly with some effort pried the old slave's mouth open, and placed the stub of a corn cob between his teeth. Just as he was certain that Uncle Zeke could do nothing but groan, he was startled at the report of Vantine's pistol and, leaping to the soldier's side, he shouted:

"You've got him at last. Did you hit him?"

Leonidas, from the shock caused by the shooting, though the bullet did not hit him, staggered from his position and leaned against Uncle Zeke's cot.

Mobaly cracked his big leather whip, and, taking one step nearer, placed his rough hand in the collar of young Darwood's coat and started for the back door, saying venomously:

"You killed the bear, did you? Well, you may live among the bears before long."

Vantine followed closely behind with his hand on his revolver, which was leveled at the back of Leonidas.

Leonidas realized that he was powerless to resist successfully, and felt that much might be gained by an apparently quiet submission to the men who, for the present, at least, were masters of the situation. It distressed him greatly to leave Uncle Zeke in such a pitiful plight, and he glanced over his shoulder for a parting look at his faithful old friend as the three left the cabin.

The crescent moon was shining brightly. From this fact Leonidas hoped for much, though he did not quite know how or why; for if help came it must be from an unexpected source. If an opportunity were ever to present itself by which he might escape he was determined to be on the alert to take advantage of it. The men moved down the driveway which led by Pompey's cabin until they stood upon the spot where their scheme had been devised in the hearing of Zeke. They paused for

an instant to consult as to the best route, and then entered the woods on their way to the river.

The Elizabeth is not properly a river, but an estuary where the tide ebbs and floods twice in four and twenty hours. In one direction it runs for five hours, and in the other it requires seven hours to spend its force; but, whether ebbing or flooding, it rushes at the rate of a galloping steed. It was ebb-tide of some two hours and a half's duration when Vantine and Mobaly reached the river with their prisoner. This, with the strong wind coming from the south, was a difficulty with which they had not reckoned, and their progress was slow.

When their craft pointed its bow into the eddy at Devil's Reach it was swung around until its wake formed a spiral of mathematical precision. As the bow struck violently against a point of land jutting out into the river, Mobaly remarked:

"This infernal place has got its right name. The devil must be down at the bottom, stirring the thing up, the way it's whirling. Confound the place! I'm going to jump out of this. I wouldn't make a good sea-dog. I'm a landlubber, I am. Sooner be on dry land any time, or, come to that, I'd rather be in the swamp than in this confounded place."

He leaped upon the shore with the killock in his hand, pulled the boat half out of the water, and then beckoned Vantine to bring his man. In a short while the three had left the boat, making their way overland to the swamp, avoiding, as far as possible, the lines of usual travel.

When within a mile of the swamp limits, on entering a heavy skirt of gum timber, an unexpected incident occurred. There was a rustling of the undergrowth, to which Mobaly and Vantine paid little heed, except that they quickened their step and commanded Leonidas to do likewise. He did not protest, however, but he did not hurry. Mobaly presently placed one hand on the arm of Leonidas and with the other in the coat collar at the back of his neck attempted to force him deeper into the woods. For the first time since leaving Briarcrest Leonidas found himself resisting the efforts of his captors. He did not know why, but he was emboldened by a presentiment that help was close at hand.

"Wehr gaht doo? Shteh!" It was Ezra, who thundered these words. As the bear trainer emerged from the undergrowth he dealt Mobaly a blow on the head which made him stagger for a moment. Then he fell against a nearby tree, and slid down its side until he lay in a heap upon the ground.

Vantine, with soldierly instinct, was not surprised, and seemed ready for the attack. He leveled his pistol and fired. The ball struck Leonidas in the side, and glancing off a rib bone passed around it in an irregular course to the back, where it emerged and buried itself in the tree just over where Mobaly lay in a semi-conscious condition.

Leonidas made a desperate effort to stand, but tottered from side to side and fell to the ground. He lay in a recumbent position, supporting himself

with his left hand. Vantine, maddened by the frustration of their plans, advanced a step and took deliberate aim at the region of his rival's heart.

"In Gots willen hargane ihm nicht!" screamed Ezra, springing at Vantine before the pistol could be discharged, grasping him by the arm and wrenching the weapon from his hand. In the next instant he had the soldier by the throat, dragging him to where Leonidas lay.

"Shoot, mine frind!" he shouted passionately, as he tightened his fingers about Vantine's throat until it was with great difficulty that the soldier could breathe. "Me kill—shoot, mine frind—mine frind save mine life—me kill you."

"Hold, Ezra, don't kill him," cried Leonidas. "I'm not seriously injured. It's only a flesh wound."

Leonidas was soon on his feet, though weak from the wound, and stood at Ezra's side. The bear trainer was in no mood to be merciful to Vantine, and Leonidas realized that the safety of his assailant depended upon him.

"Me kill him—him shoot mine frind," protested Ezra.

"No, don't kill him," answered Leonidas, as he placed his hand gently on Ezra's shoulder, "but hold him until we have an understanding."

"Captain, whose innings now, yours or mine?"

Vantine, who had not yet fully recovered, made a great effort to speak, but could not for a moment. Finally he said, "It's yours—I—suppose, though—I—did—my—best—to—kill—you."

"Captain Vantine, listen! You shot with the intention of killing me, and your aim was fairly good, but a kind Providence has saved my life. My friend, the Jew, has in an opportune moment appeared to thwart the purpose of Gabriel Arnold, Jack Mobaly and yourself; and now you are again at my mercy. If I should say the word, or should I say nothing, you would soon be a dead man, for you are powerless in the hands of Ezra, who is ready to avenge my wound by your death."

Leonidas was here forced to pause and endeavor, with the aid of Ezra, to stop the bleeding of the wound. Ezra, meanwhile, was not unmindful of Vantine, who dared not move. Presently Leonidas went on:

"He means to kill you unless I interpose. This I have done, and intend that you shall live, but I must know your purpose for the future. Do you intend to pursue me, and seek an undue advantage, and also to be an annoyance to the young woman who detests even to think of you? If I could trust you, and had your promise to change your course, so far as my interests are concerned, I would advise my friend to let you go. I have no desire to harm you, but I am determined that you shall not annoy me or Miss Proctor in the future."

"But—but—," stammered Vantine.

"But what?" interrupted Leonidas.

"Wouldn't she at least respect me, if she were permitted to do so?"

"She certainly has little respect for you," responded Leonidas, "and I am sure she will have

less when she hears of this night's work, and knows that I carry a wound made by a pistol in your hands; and that I might now be dead, but for my friend Ezra. If she has any respect for me how could she have any for you, when she learns that your purpose was to kill me? If from this moment you will never intentionally cross my path you shall be free. You know what I wish, Captain. Do you promise? Remember, if you break your promise, and fall into the hands of this man again, I shall not be responsible for the outcome. What do you say?"

"Y—e—e—e—s," he answered, still hesitating at relinquishing his hope.

Leonidas ceased speaking, and stood as if he had forgotten his surroundings. His mind had gone back to Uncle Zeke. He thought of his old friend, and the suffering he must at that moment be enduring, if, indeed, he were still alive. Whether he ever met Vantine again or not he felt that he must hurry back to Briarcrest.

Though he was uncertain as to what disposition should be made of Vantine, he was sure Mobaly should be delivered to the police authorities, to answer again for the crime of arson. He began to devise the best method of accomplishing this purpose, and suggested the course to Ezra. They turned to where Mobaly had lain, and were surprised to find he was not there. During the fracas with the soldier he had regained consciousness and had crawled away into the undergrowth and made good his escape.

Ezra was now desperate to wreak vengeance upon Vantine. "Big man gone,—kill soldier," he said as he tightened his grip on the officer's throat, "Him shoot mine frind. Kill him."

"Captain Vantine, you see how determined Ezra is, and what would happen if I should withdraw my protest," said Leonidas, taking advantage of Ezra's outburst. "You are perfectly helpless. Will you promise to go, and that for good?"

Vantine, who could not speak without difficulty on account of Ezra's hold, answered: "There is nothing I can do but go. If you wish it, I'll go."

"Will you do as I request?" persisted Leonidas. "You know what I mean. Do you promise?"

"I promise," he gasped, as the tightening of the Jew's grip changed the color of his face.

"Will you cease your attentions to Miss Proctor?" demanded Leonidas.

"Yes," this monosyllable was all he had breath to utter.

Ezra relaxed his grip, and Vantine, weak and limp, staggered off through the woods, and was soon out of sight. Ezra dressed the wound of Leonidas with necessities from his cavernous pockets and stopped the flow of blood entirely. Except for weakness, it now gave him no inconvenience whatever. Leonidas, taking Ezra by the arm, directed the way back to the boat over the same route he had recently been led.

The wind was still blowing briskly and the ebb tide was running when they reached the shore. They launched the boat and were soon in the chan-

nel of the river. Everything being favorable, they glided swiftly down the stream. To accelerate their progress Ezra improvised a mutton-leg sail out of his long garment and spritted it out before the wind. In a short time they landed, and soon entered the pine woods at Briarcrest from the east side of the farm.

The moon was shining as brightly as when they had left Zeke's cabin, and things could be distinctly seen even in the shadow of the pines. As they stepped into the path that crosses the branch, through which Leonidas had gone before, he instinctively looked toward the pine tree under which he had found the French medal. He paused, and directed Ezra to look. He wondered if it were possible for him to be mistaken. Was he being deceived by his own eyes? or was his wound producing delirium? He grasped Ezra tightly by the arm, again directing his attention.

A figure clad in white walked up and down the branch for a distance of ten feet or more; then came up from the stream, and sat beneath the pine of varied associations and bent his head dejectedly into his hands.

"No, I don't believe in ghosts," said Leonidas, half audibly; "but that's what Uncle Zeke saw several times since the day of the eclipse. What can it mean? No, I don't believe in ghosts." He hurried away from the path, through the pines, with Ezra following closely behind, with the air of a man whom nothing that he might see now would surprise.

CHAPTER XXIII

ZEKE'S SECRET REVEALED

LEONIDAS and Ezra were not long in reaching Zeke's cabin. When near the back door they discovered that some one besides Uncle Zeke was on the inside.

"Who can it be?" asked Leonidas of Ezra, as he approached cautiously, pausing to listen.

"Nigger talk," replied Ezra, as he moved near to where Leonidas stood at the door.

"Why, Aunt Dinah's got home and she's struggling over Uncle Zeke," said Leonidas, softly.

To prevent alarm, Leonidas rapped his accustomed signal on the door and stepped into the room where Uncle Zeke still lay in a heap in the corner. He beckoned to Ezra to follow him.

By the aid of the light on the hearth they were only a moment in removing the cob from the old man's mouth and also the rope from his knees and hands. They then placed their hands beneath his body and tenderly laid him upon the cot. He had lain for some time before he fully realized who the men were, though he felt that one was Leonidas and that he was safe, for he had recognized the raps on the door.

Uncle Zeke looked about the room for a few minutes, and at last his eyes rested eloquently on

Dinah, who stood weeping. He then gazed steadily at Ezra, and recognized him, and finally turned his eyes toward Leonidas, whom he took by the hand. With some effort he raised it to the side of his face, patting it feebly, then drawing it to his lips he kissed it again and again. He raised his eyes, and looked steadily into Leonidas's face with an expression which indicated that he wished to speak. As young Darwood bent over the old man he raised his arms and clasped them about the young man's neck, and, drawing his head down, he kissed him several times on the forehead.

"Mars Lonny, I's glad ter see yer," he said slowly and weakly. "Yes, Zeke's mighty glad ter see yer. I wus mighty fyard dat dem weeked men was gwine ter kill yer. Yes, Mars Lonny, I was mighty fyard. How'd yer git back, Mars Lonny? De good Marster up dar muster heped yer. Tell Zeke 'bout how yer got back."

Putting his hand on Ezra's head, letting it slip down to his shoulder, and patting him several times, Leonidas said: "My friend came just in the nick of time to save me from those wretches. That soldier-man shot me once in the side, and had good aim on my heart, and was just about to fire, when my friend Ezra interfered and saved my life. You see, I have had a narrow escape, and I must thank God for saving my life. I'm glad we were able to come back in time to relieve you. Of course, there is a Providence in it all."

"Yer's cum back, Mars Lonny, an' I's glad ter see yer. Yes, I's mighty glad ter see yer."

Leonidas observed a hesitancy about his words, and a suspicious thickening of his voice which portended a serious condition. As his voice faltered it was not difficult to observe a change in the old man's countenance.

"Uncle Zeke," said Leonidas, tenderly, "you are weak from pain and cruel usage. Suppose you let me talk, and you listen. Is there nothing I may do for you?"

He stepped to the side of the fireplace, took a gourd-dipper, filling it from the bucket in the corner, and hurried to Uncle Zeke. Placing his hand beneath Zeke's head he raised him to an upright position and put the water to his lips.

"I feels better now, Mars Lonny; I feels better, but I's mighty weak lak."

"Don't talk any more, Uncle Zeke; let me talk, and you can tell me what you want to say when you can sit up, which I trust will be before very long. Ezra, Aunt Dinah and I will be the nurses, and you the patient; and I am sure you will soon be well."

"Yer's er mighty good nuss, Mars Lonny," said Zeke, with pathos in his voice, "but yer han' ain't sof' an' nice, right lak it uster be. It wus sof' right lak Missis Mel's befoe yer went ter de Creek. What yer bin doin', Mars Lonny, wid yer han's?"

The old man lifted Leonidas's hand again, and pressed it to his lips. "What's de matter wid yer han's, Mars Lonny? Da hain't sof' an' nice now."

The old man's eyes suddenly became dim, and though he could see the three who stood by his

bed he could not distinguish them. He wished now to be assured that Leonidas, whom he loved so dearly, was really by his side; and that the hand that seemed so changed was that of his friend.

"Yes, Uncle Zeke, it is I, your friend," said Leonidas, softly.

"I knows it's yer now, Mars Lonny," said Zeke, feebly. "I knows dat sweet voice. It allus sounded lak de angils ter ole Zeke. I kain't see yer, but I knows 'tis yer, kaise Zeke kin tell yer voice; but Mars Lonny, what's de matter wid yer han'? Taint lak it uster be."

"I've been at work in the swamp for Dr. Demster, and that accounts for the change in my hands. Before I left home I never had hard work to do, and my hands were soft and white; but now things have changed and I have to work, but I am happy in it, and all will some day be explained."

"It am Mars Lonny," said Zeke, falteringly. "I knows 'tis Mars Lonny. Dat's right lak Mars Lonny's talk."

"Now don't talk any more, Uncle Zeke. Just you rest, and we'll wait until you are stronger."

"Zeke—mus'—talk—, Mars Lonny,—kaise—I's—got—sumthin'—fur—ter—tell—yer. I's—gwine—ter—die—soon—, an', Mars Lonny—, yer—mus'—know—what's—in—Zeke's—mine—, an' what's wurrid—him—sence—de—'Dark Day.' Now, Mars Lonny—let—Zeke—talk—while—he—kin."

The old man's voice became stronger, and he spoke with more animation, as he delivered himself of the prophecy.

"You'll not die yet awhile, Uncle Zeke, and I can wait until you are stronger to hear what you have to tell me. I'm sure it is important, but you can wait until you are more able to talk."

"Zeke hain't gwine ter git better, Mars Lonny. I's dyin' now, Mars Lonny," he answered, as his voice again faltered; "Zeke's dyin' now."

"O, I trust not, Uncle Zeke," Leonidas answered, slowly, but, in spite of his desire to think otherwise, fearing it might be true.

His hope of Uncle Zeke's recovery was dispelled when the old man looked steadily at him for a moment without speaking, and then finally said, "Mars Lonny, I knows it's yer, but Zeke kain't see yer."

The tears broke over the eyelids of Leonidas, and ran down his face, dropping on Uncle Zeke's hand.

He tried to speak, but his words choked him at first. Finally he bent over Uncle Zeke, smoothing his brow, and asked with difficulty:

"Can't you see anything, Uncle Zeke? Can't you see Ezra and Aunt Dinah? They are both here."

"Whar's Dinah?"

Leonidas beckoned, and Aunt Dinah moved to the bedside. She placed her hand on the old man's forehead and said simply, "Zeke," and then broke into a flood of tears, unable to say anything more.

"Dat's my Dinah, but I kain't see hur," said the dying man, sadly.

Aunt Dinah, overcome by sorrow, dropped on

the short pine log and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Can't you see anything?" inquired Leonidas.

"Yes, Mars Lonny; Zeke can see, but he kain't see yer nor Dinah," answered the old man, slowly.

"What, then, do you see?" asked Leonidas, the tears coursing down his face, as he looked into his friend's eyes. He felt that they had looked for the last time on earthly things, for earthly things they could not see.

"I see Pompey, an' de dogs hain't arter 'im no moe," said Zeke, "an' Mars Gabel hain't beetin' 'im nuther. I hyars Pompey say, 'Cum on, Zeke, dis am a good place.' Don't yer see 'im, an' hyar 'im too, Mars Lonny? Dar he am. Don't yer see 'im?"

"Do you see anyone else besides Pompey?"

"Yes, dar stans leetle Zeke," said the old man, joyfully. "My leetle Zeke. Dinah nam' 'im arter me er long time ago. Mars Gabel sol' leetle Zeke ter de traders, ter be tuck down ter Alabam. It wus when de leetle thing wus jes a nussin' baby. An' da snach 'im frum Dinah when he wus er cryin' fit ter break his heart, an' da tuck 'im away, an' I hain't seed 'im sence. No, I hain't seed 'im sence, til now; but dar he am jam by Pompey. Mars Lonny, Mars Lonny, he's hol'n out his hans fur me right lak dis."

The old man made an effort to hold his hands in the direction of what he seemed to see, but his strength soon failed him, and they dropped helpless at his side.

"Do you see anybody else?"

"I sees lots ob folks, Mars Lonny, but I don't know who da am. No, Zeke don't know who da am, but I hyars de sweetes' music dat I eber hyard in all my life. Un minit ob dat am better'n all de music Zeke eber hyard befoe. Da hain't got no banjos an' fiddles up dar. It's better'n dat. Da am singin' too. Don't yer hyar um?"

"What do they sing, Uncle Zeke?"

"Listen, an' yer hyar um, Mars Lonny," said Zeke, his voice growing weaker, "da sing 'bout Mosis an' de Lam'."

The old man paused, and remained quiet for some time. He turned his head toward Leonidas and raised it from the cot, and felt around as if in search of something, and when his hand met that of Leonidas he seemed content.

"Take Zeke's han, Mars Lonny. Zeke's dyin'. My feet am col', right lak da wus in de worter ob a col' ribber. Hain't Zeke dyin', Mars Lonny?"

"O, I'm afraid so, Uncle Zeke," answered Leonidas, "but you are not frightened?"

"I hain't fyard, Mars Lonny, no, Zeke hain't fyard. He'll soon be dar wid Pompey an' leetle Zeke. I hates ter lebe yer, Mars Lonny, but it looks mighty nice ober dar. No, Zeke hain't scyard. He wants ter go, an'—"

He hesitated, and there seemed to be a change in his train of thought, for he said: "But befoe I kin go dar I's got sumthin' fur ter tell yer, Mars Lonny. No, Zeke kain't die till he tells yer dat. De Good Man wouldn't let Zeke go whar Pompey

an' leetle Zeke am till he tol' sumbody, an' I don't want nobody ter know 'ceps yer, Mars Lonny. Zeke kain't die till he tells yer dat, an' nobody kain't hear it ceps yerself. Whar's Ezri? It don't matter 'bout Dinah. Sense Mars Gabel struck hur on de head she hain't nebber hyard sense."

Leonidas bade Ezra leave the room and remain within calling distance until he should again be needed.

"Ezra is gone now," said Leonidas; "are you strong enough to tell me what you wish me to know?"

"I—mus'—tell—yer—, Mars Lonny,—befoe—I—kin—go—whar—dat—music—am," said Uncle Zeke, and his voice showed great exhaustion as he tried to put his words together. "Set down, Mars Lonny, when I tells yer. Is—dis—Mars Lonny Darwood — what — uster — cum — ter — Zeke's cabin? Sho'? Yes,—'tis—Mars Lonny. Yer recumlect—dat—I—tol'—yer—dat—Mars Gabel Arnold—wus—er—mighty—bad—man. Well—now I's — gwine — fur — ter — tell — yer — befoe I—dies, 'bout—how—bad—Mars Gabel—am. Un da Mars Gabel wus down in de pine woods, an' I wus down dar, an' Mars Gabel didn't see me. I was settin' down jam by de holler tree, an' Mars Gabel wus standin' jam by er big pine tree by de branch dat runs through de farm, an he had er big hickry stick in his han'. When Mars Gabel wus stanin' lookin' round, dar wus er man cum up de paf frum de Gosport road. He cums up an' speaks ter Mars Gabel an' Mars

Gabel sez, 'Yer'se dat Frenchmun what's lately cum ober.' He sez, 'Yes, I's a Frenchmun, but kain't yer show me de way out'n dis woods?' He had sum munny in his han' an' Mars Gabel seed it. Da didn't hab many words, but Mars Gabel looked round ter see dat nobody wus jam by, an' den he tuck dat hickry club, and hit de man on de head. He run down de branch, an' Mars Gabel run arter 'im an' hit 'im on de head ergin. He run up an' down de branch three or foe times, an' den he run out'n de branch, an' under de pine tree ergin—Mars Gabel arter 'im all de time. When da got up ter de pine tree ergin, da tussled right smart, an' de poor man's head wus er bleedin', an' de blood went all ober Mars Gabel's close. Mars Gabel got loose an' hit de man ergin wid de hickry, an' de man fell down under de big pine tree, an' I hyard 'im groan."

Zeke paused here, partly to recover his breath and partly to shudder at the fearful memory. "I's nebber gwine ter furgit dat man's groan. Den he said sum words. He said, 'What will de Emprer think?—de 'Federacy—de 'Federacy.' An' den he sed, My poe wife,' and den he didn't say no moe. He didn't talk plain lak dat, but I know'd what he sed. Dat man muster ben sumbody great, kaise he had lots ob munny, an' he had on his brest er big shiny thing, right lak er badge, an' it shin'd right lak gol'. Mars Gabel sed, 'Now yer'se ded,' an' he search his pockits, an' tuck all de munny he had, an' he tuck frum his pockit er piece ob paper, an' sed, 'Shux, I kain't read dat—dat's French,—an' he tuck de paper an' stuck it in de holler ob er big gum

tree, jam by de pine whar he hit de man. I don't know why he didn't tare dat piece ob paper up, but he didn't. He put it in de gum tree right lak I tells yer. I furgot ter tell yer dat Mars Gabel killed dat man on de 'Dark Day'—de day yer sez wus de 'clipse. I don't know 'bout dat, but it wus er mighty 'Dark Day,' an' Zeke hain't seed no peace sense. But now I feels better sence I tol' yer, Mars Lonny."

"What did Arnold do with the man's body, Uncle Zeke?"

"I don't know, Mars Lonny; deed I don't," said Uncle Zeke. "He drug 'im down ter de edge ob de branch lak, an' when he wus out'n sight I hurried back ter de cabin, an' I wus mighty glad when I got hyar."

"Did Mr. Arnold see you in the woods that day?" asked Leonidas.

"Yes, he seed me when he drug de man down jam by de branch, an' he tol' me ef I eber tell he would kill me too; but yer know Mars Gabel hain't treated me lak he uster, sence de 'Dark Day.' Mars Lonny—yer—knows—dars—er—ghost—in dat—woods. Did—yer—eber—see—dat—ghost?"

The old man had told his secret, and now his voice faltered, and his breath came faster and faster. He raised his hand again toward Leonidas, and said, "Mars Lonny, take ol' Zeke by dis han' an' gib Dinah de udder. I's in de ribber, but I hyard sweet m-u-s-i-c, an' I sees Pompey an' leetle Zeke. I's in de col' worter, but de udder side am mighty bright, Mars Lonny."

Uncle Zeke's voice was now but a whisper, though it was evident that he had not yet said the last word. With renewed strength he sat upright, and stretched both arms out toward the foot of the cot. Leonidas put his ear to his lips to hear what he was sure would be his last words.

"Mars Lonny—Missis Bel—lobes—yer. Marry Missis Bel;—an'— Mars Lonny—when—yer—an' Missis Bel—gits—married, gits—m-a-r-r-i-e-d—"

There was a rattling sound in the old man's throat, and he seemed for the moment to be gone, but he rallied slightly, only to finish the sentence:

"Take— take—take— cyar—ob—ob— ob—Dinah."

And Uncle Zeke was dead. In death, as in life, his thought was for the welfare of those he loved.

CHAPTER XXIV

DR. DEMSTER'S WILL

THE next day at three o'clock Leonidas and Isabel met at the gum log in the pine woods, as they had planned. The death of Uncle Zeke was so sad an event for each of them that they could say little, except to express their grief at the loss of their friend. The day following they laid the faithful old slave to rest under the scuppernong arbor, where Isabel had sat when Uncle Zeke delivered the letter from Leonidas. There were only a few present, and Gabriel Arnold was reported by Isabel to be so unsettled in mind that he had not been informed of Uncle Zeke's death. She said little about her uncle, and assumed responsibility for the funeral arrangements.

After carefully putting the last sward on the grave, and when all were gone but themselves, Leonidas and Isabel planted a sprig of weeping willow at the old man's head. They then turned and walked slowly away in silence toward the sycamore lane, each tearful over the loss of the gentle, kindly old man.

"What shall I do, Leonidas?" said Isabel, at last. "Uncle Zeke is gone, my Uncle Gabriel is beside himself, Aunt Betty stupid and morose and poor Dinah, heartbroken! What shall I do?"

"Isabel, dearest, you still have me, for I am yours," he answered, taking both of her hands into one of his, and with the other smoothing her brow. "You still have me and we'll be happy."

They had now entered the pines, and stood near the place of their meeting of the day before.

"No, Leonidas, no; you must not think of it. I can never be yours, more than I am now."

"Why, Isabel!" he exclaimed in amazement, "why do you say that? I know you're mine, but, dearest, you will be more so when I take you to my breast and we are pronounced one."

"That can never be," said Isabel, looking into his eyes; she then dropped her head upon his shoulder and began to weep. "That can never be."

"Why—why—Isabel? I ask, why?" questioned Leonidas, anxiously.

"My uncle, my uncle," wailed Isabel, as she dropped on the gum log and hid her face in her hands, sobbing pitifully. After a few minutes she raised her head, and, looking through her tears, said, "You musn't think of it again. It is impossible."

"It can and it shall be. I thought we understood it all. I thought we had settled that part of it here just the other day. Why do you raise the question about your uncle again?"

"If you knew it all, Leonidas, you would not feel as you do now. You must not be embarrassed by my uncle's wicked life, and—and—me."

"Isabel," said Leonidas, as he took a place by her side, "I know more about your Uncle Gabriel now

than I did when I first told you that I loved you."

"And still do you love me, and wish me to be yours?" she asked, fearing she knew only in part how far his knowledge went.

"Isabel, listen to me. I love you, and you shall be mine. I love you for what you are, and, it does not matter what your uncle proves to be, I shall still love you—even if—"

"If he should be guilty of some heinous crime?" interrupted Isabel, catching Leonidas by the arm.

"Yes, no matter what," he answered, with emphasis. "It would be no fault of yours, and you should in no sense be blamed for what he has done. Dearest Isabel, it will not change my love for you, or my purpose concerning you. Hear me, you shall be mine. Yes, you are mine, now. Are you not, Isabel? Tell me."

"Should you not wait until you know more about my uncle?" asked Isabel, "and more about me?"

"I know it now," answered Leonidas, not seeming to notice Isabel's personal allusion. "I know he has been wicked, and is now deranged on account of his sinful life. I do not wish to know more about your uncle, but I must know that you will not allow his wickedness to influence you in the matter that is so vital to me. Won't you promise me?"

"Wait until you come to Briarcrest again," answered Isabel. "We both may know more then. I am now concerned about Uncle Gabriel, and do not know what to do with him. He does not yet know that Uncle Zeke is dead."

"Dr. Demster is needed," said Leonidas, "and I will hurry to the Creek to fetch him. A consultation may be necessary, and this may result in a decision to commit him to the asylum for the insane. I think this would be the proper disposition of his case. Once in the asylum he would be secure, and you would be relieved of much anxiety. I will have Dr. Demster here to-morrow. Isabel, dearest, be brave," said Leonidas, embracing her tenderly. "Trust me. I'll be back to-morrow. Good-bye."

Isabel hurried back to the house to make the best of a bad situation for another night and a day, and Leonidas was off for Deep Creek, over the way he had chosen to go the first time.

That evening, about dusk, Leonidas stood at Dr. Demster's office door. He was just about to rap, when he hesitated to interrupt the soliloquy of some one in the room. An instant revealed it to be the old physician himself, for his long-drawn words and his nasal twang were familiar to all who knew him. His was one of those peculiar voices that if heard once is never forgotten. Leonidas was certain he was not mistaken, and paused that the doctor might become silent before he entered.

"This is my will," the voice went on. "I am going to leave it all to him. Yes, every bit of it, and nobody else shall have any of it. Demster's got no other friend, and has not wanted any other since he came into my life. How true and manly he's been! Yes, all I've got shall be his. When he comes again I'll show him where some of it is.

The poor boy may need something before I die, and he shall have it. Did I say die? Yes, die; for I am weary of life. I wonder what would be the fate of a miserable old man who died by his own hands? How easy it would be! When the provisions of this will are known I don't care to live longer. Hello! Who's that?"

Leonidas rapped on the office door, then entered, and found Dr. Demster sitting with his elbows on the table, and his head supported by his hands. A document was spread out before him and he made no effort to conceal it.

"It's you, Lonny, my boy," said the doctor, gladly. "I've been wishing you'd come. I've been thinking about you, and talking about you, too. It's always been to myself, and not to others, that I've talked when I thought about you. They tell me when an old man talks to himself he's talking to the devil, but I don't believe that. I know it's not true when I've talked about you. The subject's too good."

"I fear the devil thinks about me a great deal, Doctor. Indeed, he seems to pursue me persistently, and every once in a while I have a hand-to-hand struggle with him. He seems to be my adversary, and attempts frequently to hedge up my way."

"You must have come into contact with old Gabriel Arnold," said the doctor, knowingly. "He's more like the devil than anybody else in Tidewater. But I told you to look out for him. Have you ever encountered him?"

"No, not personally," said Leonidas, slowly, "but I've come into contact with Captain Vantine, and he is very nearly as bad as Gabriel Arnold."

"Captain Vantine! Why, what's he done?" demanded the doctor.

"Shot me here," said Leonidas, pointing to his side. "It's not much of a wound, but he intended to kill me. He was ready to fire a second time, and would have done so, but my friend Ezra was sent by Providence just in time to prevent him. But, Doctor, you don't believe in the doctrine of Providence, and I should not have introduced it here."

The old man arose and insisted upon examining the wound, which he pronounced well cared for and of slight significance. He put his arms about the neck of Leonidas, and hugged him tightly. Then releasing his hold he said earnestly, with tears in his eyes:

"I do believe in Providence, my boy. I didn't once. I didn't before you came into my life. I accept what you believe. It must be true or you would not believe it. Teach me, my boy. You know about such things better than I do. My life has been spent considering hard things, and I have wasted much time trying to doubt, and you don't know how difficult it would be for me to find the right way. But your Bible speaks about a little child leading older people. Now, I want you to be my teacher and lead me out of this fog. I can't live long, and I know your chances are better than mine. I would so much like to have your faith.

Lonny, my boy; you'll tell me about that, won't you?"

"O, it will be a pleasure to me, Doctor."

"Then I am content," said the doctor, taking his seat again, and inviting Leonidas to sit down by his side.

"This is for you," said the doctor, pointing to the document on the table. "This is why I have been wishing you would come. It is my will. I've just written it, and have mentioned you by name. All I have will be yours in time. If Annie had only lived; my Annie! Well, she sickened and died. All I have shall be yours. Some of it you can't get until I die, but some of it you will need before. Come with me and I will show you."

The doctor arose and walked slowly to the northeast corner of the room to the box that contained Pompey's bones, and took from it an iron rod, sharpened at one end.

"This will tell us where it is," he said, as he started for the door, and beckoned Leonidas to follow.

As they passed through the kitchen, the doctor took a lantern that was hanging to an exposed beam and, without lighting, handed it to Leonidas, saying, "This may be of use to us before we return." The two passed out of the door, entering the path that led in the direction of the creek.

They felt their way, in the darkness, around the edge of the water until they came to the willow tree under which Dr. Demster was wont to spend much time in reverie.

"It is not far from here, through the thicket yonder," said the doctor. "That's where I want you to go with me. I'll lead the way and you follow."

They came to a thick growth of muscadine, back of which was a dense thicket. The doctor pushed back the undergrowth with the rod, then bent upon hands and knees, crawling through the path, with Leonidas following closely behind him. After creeping for a hundred yards or more they came to a small clearing in the midst of which stood a medium-sized beech tree.

"This is the place. We'll stop here," said the doctor. "Light the lantern. We shall need it now."

Leonidas did as the doctor said, and watched to see what was next to be done. It was not clear to him just why he had been brought to this lonely spot. He called to mind that part in the soliloquy wherein the doctor had expressed himself as being weary of life, and wondered if this were where he wished to be buried.

"Why—why, Doctor!" exclaimed Leonidas, tremblingly.

"This is the place, my boy, and this will tell why we came and what I want you to know," said the doctor, as he took the iron rod and stuck it in the ground not more than three feet from the body of the tree. "Take this, and run it down here."

Leonidas took the rod and put his weight upon it, forcing it into the ground, until it stopped suddenly against a hard substance.

"Have you hit it?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, Doctor," said Leonidas; "but what is it? The rod can go no farther."

"Then I struck the spot the first time," said the doctor, with satisfaction. "What you feel is the top of an iron pot. I buried it here when the war began. It is filled with gold, but I do not know just how much it contains. There are several thousand dollars though, I'm sure. The banks are insecure, and the safest place for money is in the ground in a good quiet place like this. This is why I put it here."

The old man paused, as if to listen, then putting his lips to Leonidas's ear he said: "This is for you when you need it. Come here some night like this one, and dig it up. Besides this, all I have will be yours in time."

"O, Doctor, do you mean it?" asked Leonidas, overcome by such fortune. "How could you give me all you have? I'm not even related to you, but only a friend. How can you do it!"

"You're not my relative," said the doctor, "but you're more. You are my friend. Yes, you, in a sense, are my saviour. You have come into my old age, when I was so sad and lonely. You have saved me from doubt and wickedness; and all I have is yours. Do as I bid you with it. All I ask is that when you and Isabel are married, which I trust will be very soon, you will let me come and visit you once in a while, to see how happy you are. I can then fancy how my Annie and I would have been had she lived to sweeten my life."

The doctor and Leonidas retraced their steps and were soon again in the office.

The young man was lost in wonder at the sudden turn in his affairs, for up to this time he had not been earning much more than enough to meet the expenses of a scant living at Audierne. Now abundance was in sight, and he found it difficult to realize that it was true. But here before his eyes were the provisions of Dr. Demster's will, which committed the whole of his large fortune to him.

The old physician saw the young man's surprise was so great that it was not easy to adjust himself to the new and changed conditions.

"Where did you come from, Leonidas, and what did you want?"

"I came from Briarcrest, Doctor, and must tell you that things there are in a pitiful plight. The old slave, Zeke, is dead and buried; and Mr. Arnold is mad—sometimes morose, and at other times raving. I wish you would go to-morrow and see what is best to be done. Some steps will have to be taken or Isabel will be prostrated with worry. Will you go to-morrow, Doctor?"

"Yes, I'll go," said the doctor, "and relieve the situation as far as possible. But have you learned what the trouble is with old Gabe Arnold? You know what my suspicions have been, and my mind has not changed concerning him. I believe that he has committed some awful crime that has been preying on his mind until his brain has given away under the strain. And, do you know, I am inclined

to believe that when all the facts about Gabe Arnold's trouble are known, the mystery that surrounds Count de Bussy's death will be unraveled."

"Your reasoning is correct, Doctor," said Leonidas. "I have all the facts necessary to show the truth of your conclusion. Uncle Zeke, when dying, told me the whole story, and it is just as you suppose. The very worst is true. Mr. Arnold murdered the Count on the spot where I found the medal, and murdered him, too, to obtain a few paltry dollars; for he robbed his pockets as soon as he was dead. But there is one part of Zeke's story I wish to verify."

"What?" exclaimed the doctor, his interest at fever heat.

"Uncle Zeke said that Mr. Arnold, in searching the Count's dead body, found a paper, and that he said it was written in French, but instead of tearing it up, as almost anybody would have done, he put it into a hollow tree. I wish to find that paper if I can."

"Then the old negro must have seen the crime committed," said the doctor, in astonishment. "Was he in any way implicated?"

"Not in the least. He was simply in the woods, and his master did not observe him until it was all over."

"This, then, is the reason why old Zeke has had such a grip on Gabe Arnold," said the doctor. "And then—to think of it!—he has been carrying that dreadful secret all these weeks. You are quite

right about that paper. It will verify old Zeke's story, and it will probably throw some light upon the Count's business that some of us would like to have. Get that paper by all means, Leonidas."

"Doctor, what is the best disposition to make of Mr. Arnold," asked Leonidas, "assuming that he was responsible for the death of Count de Bussy?"

"The only disposition now is to send him to Williamsburg. No one knows of the crime but you and me; and it is not worth while to embarrass what few friends he has and to bring disgrace upon his innocent niece. He will probably not live long anyway; so the best place for him is the asylum and we will hurry him off as soon as possible."

"I share your opinion," said Leonidas, eagerly. "I have thought, in view of all the circumstances, that this would be proper. If he were sane, and simply trying to conceal his crime, I should not carry his secret a day longer, but as it now stands I am willing to do as you suggest in the matter."

"Would you tell it and marry Isabel, too?" asked the doctor, curiously.

"Yes, I would tell it, and marry Isabel, with all the opprobrium it might bring. She is not responsible for her wicked uncle, and should not be compelled to suffer unnecessarily on his account. The poor girl has already had more sorrow than enough, and she will not suffer when her uncle is committed to the asylum."

"You're a true man," said the doctor, "and I think the more of you for the position you take.

Not every man would like to take to himself the niece of a man who has been executed as a common murderer."

"I would, when that niece is Isabel Proctor, Doctor," said Leonidas, and his voice and form seemed majestic as he spoke the words.

"That will do," answered the doctor, patting Leonidas on the shoulder, "I will go to Briarcrest tomorrow and you shall go with me."

CHAPTER XXV

THE HOLLOW TREE

THE next day, just as the sun was sinking behind the juniper and the cypress trees of the Great Swamp, Dr. Demster and Leonidas crossed the Deep Creek bridge and soon disappeared around a bend in the road. Clouds, borne upon the breeze, were flying across the sky, obscuring, at intervals, the full moon; so it was quite dark as the doctor's flea-bitten gray mare jogged up to the worm fence that bounded Briarcrest on the south. Having hitched the mare, and helped the doctor over the rails, Leonidas led the way down the path in the direction of the big pine, all the while looking about him to see if the man in white would again make his appearance.

They had not gone far when a figure could be distinctly seen sitting under the pine tree on the same spot. He was holding his hand to his head, just the same as the man in white had done. Between his groans, they could distinctly hear him cry, "O, if I only had not done it!" He then ran into the branch, walking back and forth in the water. Presently he came to the tree again—all the while holding his hand to his head. Though the man was not now attired in white, still Leonidas was convinced that he was the same man, and that

it was Gabriel Arnold. He touched Dr. Demster on the shoulder to attract his attention.

"That's Gabe Arnold now," said the doctor. "We'll go to him. What say you?"

The doctor's high-pitched voice penetrated the forest, and Arnold heard it. He ran through the branch and leaped into the path, and then through the woods, crying as he ran:

"They are coming! They'll get me! They'll get me! Zeke, I told you not to tell."

"This is the place," said Leonidas to Dr. Demster, as they paused under the tree where Arnold had been sitting.

"This is where I found the medal, and this is the place where Count de Bussy met his fate. I suppose the crime has haunted Gabriel Arnold to such an extent that in his delirium he has wandered down here. Is it not strange that he frequents the scene of his crime? I am sure now it was he whom Uncle Zeke saw and thought to be a ghost."

"How about the paper that Zeke told you of?" asked the doctor, indicating that he felt great interest in the writing, whatever it might prove to be. "Can you locate the tree? Did you say it was a gum tree?"

"Yes, it was a gum tree, and this is it, I think," said Leonidas, as he turned and walked over to a tree which stood near. "I am sure this is the one. Come and see."

Leonidas was soon on the ground, feeling about the root of the tree for the entrance to the hollow in which Arnold had concealed the paper.

"I've found it," exclaimed Leonidas.

"What! the paper?" asked the doctor, excitedly.

"No, the hollow," said Leonidas, "but I feel sure the paper is not far away. Uncle Zeke knew what he was talking about."

By this time the old doctor was upon the ground anxiously watching the movements of Leonidas as he groped after the paper. Feeling about in all directions, his hand seemed to stray away into one of the great roots which had rotted like the body of the tree. Many inches down in this hollow he felt a paper, which he hoped would prove to be the object of his search.

"I've got it, Doctor. It's ours at last."

He drew the paper out, and carefully straightened it, and handed it to the doctor, while he made a light by setting fire to some dry leaves. Sure enough, it was written in the French language, but had been torn at the bottom, and had neither name nor date. With this defect much of its value was gone. Leonidas again put his hand into the hollow, and found hanging on a splinter a much smaller piece of paper of the same texture, and an examination and comparison showed that it had been torn from the original writing.

Placing it in the light of the fire they saw the reward of their effort confronting them. On the right side of the slip of paper, and near the bottom edge was simply the word, "Napoleon," while beginning on the left, and ending nearly across the sheet, were the words, "Thouvenel, Minister of Foreign Affairs." While still below this, and in

the left corner of the paper, were the words, "Comte de Bussy, Commissioner to the Confederate States Government."

In his excitement the doctor began: "It's written in cipher, and surely is of great importance, but de Bussy has translated it into plain French, so it is easy to read. By the Eternal! It's the Count's private instructions from Napoleon to President Davis. Let us see what it says:"

"His Majesty the Emperor of the French, taking into consideration the present success and the future prospects of the Confederate States of America, directs that you, Comte de Bussy, be a Commissioner to the said Confederate States, and that you proceed at once to Richmond, the capital, to confer with the President and Secretary of State concerning matters looking to the proper recognition of their government by the Empire of France. Proceed with great caution, and do not commit His Majesty's Government to any policy without first reporting the attitude of the Confederacy touching the following points:

"I. The reestablishment of the Republic of Texas. It is highly important for the interest of the French Empire in America to have a weaker, though an apparently independent, power between the Confederate States and Mexico, though in fact, under the protection of His Majesty's Government. Confer with Theron, French Consul in Texas.

"II. The abolition of slavery. The English are not willing for an Anglo-French recognition of the Confederate States while slavery is maintained.

Ascertain if the Richmond Government will concede this point if recognition can thereby be accomplished.

“NAPOLEON.

“Thouvenel, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

“Comte de Bussy, Commissioner to Confederate States Government.”

“Great guns!” exclaimed the doctor, greatly excited, “this is conclusive. It is evident that de Bussy was murdered here, as it corroborates Zeke’s story. And the finding of this, his private instruction from Napoleon III, shows exactly what he was doing in the Confederacy. I’m sorry he was murdered, but I shall be glad if the whole project come to grief. If it can be prevented, I trust it will not succeed.”

The doctor was silent for a few moments before he spoke again:

“Think of it. Napoleon’s pretensions are not genuine after all. He is a selfish old scoundrel; an old hypocrite. See what he says about Texas. He wants to make an independent republic out of Texas and wedge it in between the Confederate States and Mexico. President Davis will never consent to that. And this is why Count de Bussy was here! I trust the project will not succeed. Then he wishes slavery abolished before he recognizes the Confederacy. What would the South do without slavery? We might as well let all go as yield this point. Pshaw! The South had better fight it out fairly and squarely, and win or be defeated without this deceitful Emperor. I will write Davis my views on the subject, and tell him that Napo-

leon will only favor the Confederacy when it is to his own advantage to do so, and not before."

Leonidas rose quickly, greatly surprised.

"You may well be shocked at the Emperor," said the doctor, as he himself stood and took Leonidas by the hand.

"I'm not surprised at the Emperor," said the young man, excitedly, "but I heard an unusual sound. It was a human voice—whether of man or woman, I cannot say."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SUICIDE

The doctor passed the document to Leonidas, who folded it hastily, putting it into the inside pocket of his coat. The two then made their way through the pines toward Arnold's home. When they emerged from the thicket, and approached the house, they detected a commotion on the front veranda.

The doctor and Leonidas were in the nick of time, for it proved to be Isabel making a desperate effort to restrain her Uncle Gabriel, who was at that moment in a paroxysm of delirium, and it was his voice that Leonidas had heard while at the hollow tree.

"We are just in time," said Leonidas, quickly, as he leaped upon the veranda and put his hand on Arnold's shoulder. "We'll take care of him now, Isabel."

"O, they've got me! They've got me, Isabel! O! O!" screamed Arnold, as Leonidas pulled him toward the door.

"We will not hurt you, Mr. Arnold," said Leonidas, quietly, "we wish only to do the proper thing for you. Come into the house."

Arnold screamed again, "They've got me, they've got me at last." Then, after a brief silence, he



THE ARNOLD HOMESTEAD AT BRIARCREST

said in a subdued tone, "Zeke, I told you not to tell."

In a moment Isabel had opened the door and Leonidas forced her uncle into the hall, and then to his room, with Dr. Demster following closely behind. When in the bedchamber Arnold again became violent, and struggled desperately to escape, not seeming to recognize either the doctor or Isabel. He had never seen Leonidas before. The climax of his madness was reached when he glanced toward the corner of the room where the hickory club was standing with which he committed the murder.

There was a blood stain on the stick, which had been there since the day of the tragedy. Arnold had not observed it until this moment. The sight of the blood made him frantic, and he became almost uncontrollable. Insane as he was, he still could live through the tragedy of the "Dark Day," on which Count de Bussy met his fate. His struggles were overcome; for Leonidas held him tightly in his grasp upon the floor pressing the knees against his breast. Dr. Demster administered an opiate and Arnold soon lay unconscious, breathing in short snatches like a dying man. He was then placed upon the bed.

"What shall we do with him, Doctor?" asked Leonidas.

"Let him rest for a while," answered the doctor, "then we shall consult the authorities and conform to the Virginia law. When this is done, we shall hurry him off to the asylum for the insane. He is

hopelessly crazy. I am sure he will not live long, but while he does live he is certain to be violent, and should be under the care of those who are prepared to treat a man in his condition."

"There are times when he is quite sane," remarked Isabel, "or appears to be so. Just the other day he seemed rational, and wrote what I suspect was a letter. He concealed it somewhere and I have not yet found it. I do not know what he was writing, but I am certain it was a matter of interest and importance. No, Doctor, my uncle is not totally insane, though at times he is wild and unmanageable. While you and Leonidas are here let me search for that letter."

"Are you sure you are right, in the plan you propose?" asked Leonidas, when Isabel had closed the door behind her. "Is it right, after all, that Mr. Arnold's crime should be kept from the authorities? It may be as she says, that he is not absolutely insane, and that there are times when he is rational, and knows what he is doing. This makes him responsible. It seems to me the authorities should know about it."

"No; never, never. He is a fit subject for the asylum. Let them keep him until he is restored to his reason, if he ever is. My opinion is that he will not live long and this will solve the difficulty."

"How about Count de Bussy's wife?" asked Leonidas. "Should she not know that the Count will never return? The poor thing is wild with suspense. She would be far better off to know the truth concerning him."

"Don't be in too great a hurry to do right, my boy," said the doctor. "Let us go slowly. It will do no harm to commit him to the asylum, and await results. When he recovers his mind it will be time enough to think of the next course to pursue. I'll be back soon."

The doctor left Leonidas with Gabriel Arnold, as Isabel returned from a fruitless search for the letter.

"What did the doctor say about Uncle Gabriel?" Isabel asked, softly.

Leonidas was bending over Arnold's body and did not hear what she said. He seemed to be listening, rather, to what fell from the lips of her uncle, who muttered as he slept. Isabel approached Leonidas and put her hand upon his shoulder before he observed that she was near him.

"What did the doctor say?" she asked again, as Leonidas rose and led the way to the other side of the room.

"That your uncle is insane, and must be committed to the asylum, Isabel; but somehow or other I feel that the doctor is mistaken. I can't explain it, but I have a presentiment that his case will terminate in some other way. Whether it will be better or worse I do not know. I don't believe he will go to the asylum. I did think this at first, but my mind has changed and I do not know why."

"I feel that something awful will happen, too, Leonidas," said Isabel, wringing her hands and beginning to weep.

Leonidas lifted Isabel's head until her eyes, red

and heavy from weeping, looked pitifully up to his own, and said, "No matter what happens, dearest Isabel, we'll be happy."

"How can I ever be happy, when there is so much evil surrounding my life?" asked Isabel. "Can I ever forget the sadness of my life?"

"But you are mine, Isabel. Be brave, and let us trust for a brighter day."

"O, O, O!" cried Isabel, in a shrill voice, that made Leonidas wonder what had happened. "Look! Look! Uncle! My uncle! See! See!"

Leonidas turned quickly, and was startled to observe Arnold sitting upon the side of his bed with a bright steel blade in his hand. He raised the knife in his right hand and, with the left hand pointing toward a small cupboard in the northeast corner of the room, said, "There! It's there—Isabel!"

Before another word could be spoken or a step taken Gabriel Arnold had plunged the knife into his breast, and falling back upon the bed left the blade sticking in his body.

Isabel rushed to where Arnold lay, and with an impulse as quick as thought she snatched the knife and threw it upon the floor. Then, as if by some reaction in her strength she dropped limp at his bedside.

"Uncle, Uncle," she cried, and the tone of her voice, in the midst of her sobbing, revealed the anguish of her heart.

"It's all over now, Isabel," said Leonidas, placing his arm around her. "Your uncle has solved the problem."

"A suicide!" sobbed Isabel, as she dropped her head against Leonidas's shoulder and began to cry bitterly. "And a murderer, too."

Isabel raised her head and with an heroic effort ceased sobbing. She looked steadily into Leonidas's face for a moment, then asked, "Leonidas, did my Uncle Gabriel murder Count de Bussy?"

"It is as you think, Isabel," said Leonidas, sadly. "Your uncle is a murderer and a suicide. There is no doubt about his having killed Count de Bussy. What a problem he solves!"

"What problem, Leonidas?" questioned Isabel, anxiously.

"The problem as to what should be done with him," answered Leonidas. "I knew him to be a murderer. I thought so when I saw you in the pines, but was not absolutely certain. There was a train of circumstances that always led to him whenever it was followed, but then the train was not complete until Uncle Zeke told me of the tragedy in the pine woods. It lacked the two last links: one being Uncle Zeke's statement, the other the finding of the paper. I did not tell you what I believed, because I was not absolutely certain. A part of my information was wanting. This is why I did not say before that your uncle was a murderer."

"Did Uncle Zeke tell you?" asked Isabel, with a nervous tremor in her voice.

"Yes, Uncle Zeke told the whole story just before he died, and his story was corroborated by the finding of the Count's private instruction from Na-

oleon III in a hollow tree near the spot where he was murdered," said Leonidas, taking the document from his pocket and pointing to the name on the detached piece.

"But I interrupted you," said Isabel. "What problem is solved by my uncle's suicide?"

"If your uncle had lived, I could not have carried his secret."

"You should not have done so, even though the murderer was my uncle," replied Isabel, with conviction. "He should have suffered for his crime, and I—"

"Don't think of it again. No matter what turn the case might have taken I would love you still and make you mine. Should the public ever know it will in no way effect my love for you."

"But this does not change the fact that I am the niece, and live in the house of my uncle who is a murderer and a suicide, and you know what that means to me, and what it may mean to you in the future. I am not willing to embarrass you or to put myself in a position to be humiliated."

"Why, Isabel," answered Leonidas, with much tenderness, "you surely do not mean to reflect upon me by forecasting my future conduct toward you. I love you, and wish to give you my name. We may now bury this dark chapter forever out of sight. Isabel, promise me, here and now, never to refer to it again."

"Gabe Arnold will go to the asylum," announced Dr. Demster, in his long-drawn nasal twang, as he

opened the door and came into the room unceremoniously.

The old physician was only an instant in realizing what had happened in his absence. A glance at Arnold as he lay upon the bed, with the knife in sight and the blood-stained clothing, was all the explanation necessary. He knew Arnold had reached the end and had taken his own life. He was sure, too, it had been done so quickly that Leonidas and Isabel had been unable to prevent it.

"Not to the asylum, Doctor," said Leonidas. "The problem is solved. We have nothing further to do with this crime. This is a terrible ending of the case, but I am free to confess that since it came in this manner there are some compensations to those who are most involved."

"He must have done it very quickly," said the doctor. "He didn't get as big a dose as I intended or he would have slept until now."

"It was quickly done," said Leonidas. "Isabel observed him first, sitting upon the side of the bed with a knife in his hand. She called my attention, but before anything could be done to prevent it he had driven the blade hilt-deep into his breast. I suspect it went to his heart, for he died with a groan."

"Then he said nothing?" inquired the doctor, surprised.

"Oh, yes," said Leonidas, "just before plunging the knife he pointed toward the corner, there, and said, 'There—it's—there, Isabel!'"

"Then we'll look," broke in the doctor.

They went to the little cupboard, and with some effort sprang the lock and opened the door. On the top shelf, under the lid of a musty old book, they found a paper in Arnold's handwriting. It was the paper which Isabel saw him write a few days before. Across the top edge of the paper were the words, "The last statement and request of Gabriel Arnold," written in a bold hand.

"I am a desperate man. I have shed human blood, and that the blood of a man who never offended me in the least. There is not the slightest fact that justifies it. So far as I am concerned, he was an innocent man. I am the cruel murderer of Count de Bussy. I murdered him for a small sum of money. Since the day of the eclipse of the sun I have known nothing of the world, and have desired to know nothing. Life to me has been a burden and I have often wished I might die. I would terminate my miserable existence but for the fact that I fear to face the consequences of my wicked deed and meet the Count in the other world. I am a coward, and I know it. If I am ever brave enough I shall meet the Count face to face. I have tried to run the dagger to my wicked heart but have always failed because of cowardice. Some day I'll be brave enough to die and face my victim.

"I wish to be buried where the world can never find my grave (if it's to be a grave); so that my body, which has been driven into crime, may rest while my wretched soul is enduring its doom. I do not deserve a man's burial. To bury me like a

dog would be a great honor to one so wicked, and I ask this boon.

"I trust my niece will find this paper when I am dead, and do as I request.

"These are my wishes:

"1. At two o'clock in the morning consign my wretched body to a hole in the ground. Don't call it a grave. Bury it at the root of the third tree of the sixth row in the old apple orchard—the place where my hound dogs have lain for more than forty years.

"2. When buried with my dogs, fix the place so that no one will ever find the spot. I wish to be forgotten forever. I do not deserve to live in the memory of any mortal.

"3. Do not honor me with a coffin. If the law requires one, put me in a yellow-pine box fastened together with white-oak pegs.

"If this paper falls under the eye of my niece first, I trust she will do as I request, and call only one or two others to assist her, and pledge them to secrecy.

"This is my last statement and request, and may God have mercy on my soul.

"GABRIEL ARNOLD."

"Well! Well! Well!" exclaimed the Doctor, "We'll do as he wishes, and bury him among his dogs."

CHAPTER XXVII

A CHANGE OF MIND

GABRIEL ARNOLD'S wishes were observed, as far as practicable. He was buried two hours after midnight under the third tree of the sixth row in the old apple orchard, which had been the graveyard for his hounds for more than forty years.

The burial was over and the little company had returned to the house. They were about to ascend to the veranda when Isabel paused and staggered, and would have dropped powerless at the step had not Dr. Demster stood near and supported her.

"My uncle, my uncle, a murderer, and a—" she moaned, but had not consciousness to finish the speech.

She was borne by the doctor and Leonidas into the house, and more than an hour passed in the use of restoratives before she regained control of herself. The young man had dropped on one knee at the side of the couch and rubbed her brow, looking anxiously into her pale face for a time before a word was said.

"Is it serious, Doctor?" he asked, much concerned.

"I trust not," said the physician, as he felt her pulse with one hand, and pinched her eyelid with

the other. "No, I trust not. Her pulse is strong, and her eye is clear."

"Will she soon recover? What's the trouble? Has she only fainted?"

"It is the natural reaction from the long and terrible strain," answered the doctor. "The girl has been worried almost past endurance. She could not help having suspicion concerning her uncle. She feared the worst in his case, but she has borne it heroically. Now that it is all over the reaction was more than she could stand. But I think she will soon be well again."

"Do you think she suspected her uncle of murdering Count de Bussy?"

"Since my second visit, I think she did," answered the doctor.

"I fear so, too, and that is why she has not consented to become my wife."

"What's that?" demanded the doctor, quickly. "Hasn't consented to become your wife? Why, what does this mean? I thought you would marry without delay."

"She thinks the wickedness of her uncle stands as an obstacle in the way," said Leonidas sadly, gazing at her. "She calls herself an unfortunate girl, and, while I am sure of her love, she insists that, because of her relationship to such a wicked man as Gabriel Arnold, we ought not to marry, as it might discredit me."

"She is nobler even than I thought," said the doctor, with satisfaction in face and voice. "How do you feel about this?"

"I honor her for the position she takes," replied Leonidas, "but I am anxious that she should yield her point. I am not the least bit concerned about the opinions of society. Isabel Proctor is a true, upright girl. She is unfortunate to have had an uncle like Gabriel Arnold, but she is in no way responsible for this misfortune; and I think I should be cruel indeed to pay any attention to it. I love her and I know my love is returned, and I shall marry her if her objection can be overcome."

"Then you don't seem to care what comments may follow," said the doctor, wishing to know how the young man would view the matter.

"I'm sorry that Isabel's uncle was a murderer and a suicide. I am also sorry to think there would be any unfavorable comment. But Isabel is pure and good and that settles the matter with me. Yes, Doctor, I shall marry her, and be happy, no matter what people may say."

"Again you are a hero, my boy," exclaimed the doctor, "and soon you will have all I possess and be independent. You'll be rich. Do you realize it?"

"Yes, I think I realize it," answered Leonidas, "and I shall be happy to give her what she deserves and thereby compensate for the suffering she has endured. She has had a hard time, but she has been heroic in it all. I trust she will see it as I do. Doctor, I shall never be governed by the uncharitable whims of the people. It needs only Isabel's consent and we shall be married. I am sure this is your desire, for—"

During the conversation Dr. Demster had taken a seat by the bedside and was holding Isabel's hand, while Leonidas stood with his hand upon the old physician's shoulder.

Isabel now stirred. She turned her head and looked about the room with unseeing eyes. She seemed dazed, but in a moment she moaned:

"O, the shame of it! Leonidas will be disgraced."

"Dearest Isabel," said Leonidas, quickly.

"My uncle, my uncle—a murderer, and a suicide. Murdered Count de Bussy. Killed himself," she said distinctly, turning her head and looking up into Leonidas's face.

"It's all true," said the young man, "and sad enough, but will you not forget it? Let us make the best of the future. Here is our friend—the doctor. When you are stronger we will talk about our plans."

Isabel was weak, and greatly in need of rest, so it was toward the middle of the forenoon before the subject was mentioned again. Then the three left the house and walked leisurely down the sycamore lane and entered the path which passed through the pines, stopping at the gum log.

"It was here that we saw the red-bird that seemed so happy," said Isabel, and it was evident that she entertained the same sad thoughts that had annoyed her when she last visited the spot.

"Yes," admitted Leonidas, "it was here we saw the bird, but it was here, too, that you made me happy when you told me you loved me."

"Yes, you were happy," Isabel answered, "but I could not help feeling sad in my own heart, and sorry that you loved me. I felt that your love should have been bestowed upon another—one less unworthy."

"But you don't feel so now; do you, Isabel? Have you not dismissed that delusion?"

"I still feel that I am an unfortunate girl," insisted Isabel, "and that you do not deserve the embarrassment that I would of necessity cause you."

"But listen, my girl," broke in the doctor. "I know how you feel. It is very thoughtful, but don't press the matter any further. This is my boy now and you are dear to me on his account. He loves you and you love him. I want you to marry and be happy, so I can come to see you once in a while. This is the old doctor's advice. You will do this, I am sure."

"We will do better," interrupted Leonidas. "We will marry and live at Briarcrest, and you shall live with us. You have been alone long enough and it will gladden our life if you will stay at our home."

The old physician was not a little stirred by this new idea proposed by Leonidas. It would be a great change for a man who had lived alone so many years, and he hardly knew just how he could conform to the new and changed condition, but he was impressed with the suggestion. He put his hands on the shoulders of the young people and, addressing Isabel, said: "If you marry Leonidas will you let me live with you? I would like to be with my

boy; and if you love him I want to be with you, too. Say: will you dismiss that idea you have and marry soon? And then I am sure we will all be happy. Tell me, will you do this?"

"O, Doctor," said Isabel, with sadness and uncertainty in her voice, "is it right for me to marry Leonidas and have him discredited for life? You know the people would point at him in derision because he had married Gabriel Arnold's niece. My uncle was a murderer and a suicide, and the stigma will rest upon me for life. I do not think Leonidas should be so handicapped."

"But nobody knows that your uncle was a murderer," responded the doctor. "Nobody but ourselves know how de Bussy came to his death. Let it be a secret forever, and nobody need ever know. The fact that your uncle committed suicide will not disgrace you, as many a worthy man in a moment of temporary insanity has taken his own life."

"It is true," replied Isabel, "that no one else knows of the murder of the Count, but I shall not be content until his poor wife knows about it—at least until her suspense is relieved. The poor thing is frantic because she does not know whether he is dead or alive. I shall not rest until she is informed that he is dead. Until you and Leonidas consent to this I shall forever say 'No.'"

"It is right that the woman should know," admitted the doctor, "but there is a way to tell her and still not afflict yourself any more than necessary. Yes, she should know. But even this should not prevent your marriage. You marry

Leonidas, and the sooner it's done the better. I'll attend to arrangements. I'll get the license, then fetch the parson, and such like. I'll be back before the rise of another sun. Mind that, now, my children."

The old physician walked slowly away, leaving the lovers beneath the twining branches of the dogwood and swamp laurel.

"Isabel, dearest, will you dismiss all objections from your mind? Tell me, dearest, will you be mine?" asked Leonidas, when the doctor had gone.

"Leonidas, Leonidas," she answered sadly, "do you know what you ask? And do you mean it?"

"I know, dearest Isabel, and I mean it with all my heart. Will you consent?"

Isabel looked up into Leonidas's face for a moment before she replied. She hesitated, then attempted to speak, but recalled her words before they could pass her lips. The decision was momentous. She could scarcely tell what to say.

"Leonidas,—I—I—"

"Tell me. Tell me, darling," said Leonidas, "that you will be mine. Say so, dearest."

"O, Leonidas, Leonidas, you do not realize all that will follow, I fear, or you would not wish me to consent. Again I say so noble a name as yours should not be blighted by marriage with a name so scarlet as mine."

"I know what your mind magnifies so, dearest," said Leonidas, "but in spite of it I love you, and must have your consent to be mine."

"No, no, it cannot be," said Isabel, tearfully, but

still hesitating. Suddenly she threw aside the light figured shawl she wore, and thrust her hand nervously into the bosom of her dress, taking from it a note which she handed to Leonidas.

"What is it, Isabel?" he asked, observing that she was greatly agitated as she passed it to him.

"O," she cried, "can it be possible? Is it true of me? You see by this I can never be yours. I should disgrace you forever."

"PORTSMOUTH, VA."

"ISABEL PROCTOR: I write this to let you know that the thought of you is obnoxious to me, and that any relationship between you and my son Leonidas meets with my positive disapproval. You are not worthy of a Darwood. It is bad enough to be poor, but the fact that a girl makes her home with such a man as Gabriel Arnold, is sufficient to brand her forever and unfit her for association with respectable people.

"Besides, it may be said to your discredit that there is a dark mystery connected with your birth. To speak frankly, you are an illegitimate child of unknown parents. I want you to understand that I cannot tolerate the thought of Leonidas associating with such a person when there is the remotest danger of her becoming his wife. I believe such an event is possible, and that it accounts for his being away from his home at this time.

"If you have any regard for the wishes of respectable members of society you will discourage the attentions of my son.

"THOMAS DARWOOD."

When Leonidas finished reading the note he deliberately tore it into several pieces and threw it under foot.

"This is what I care for the insult," he said, as he raised his heel and turned upon the sole of his shoe, grinding the bits of paper deeper into the ground. "I heard this before. I knew what my father thought when I left home, Isabel; and now I renew my entreaty."

"Is it nothing to you, Leonidas, that I am of unknown birth?" asked Isabel. "That I am an illegitimate child?"

"Not in the least," he replied, emphatically. "It is unjust to blame people for what they cannot control. If the worst that is said by my father be true you are in no sense responsible for it and I shall not allow it to influence me. I am more anxious than ever to hear from your lips the words which will make me happy. Will you say them now?"

"But, Leonidas, I have a strange idea, and it has annoyed me every hour since I received your father's note. Suppose it turns out at last that I am the child of Gabriel Arnold, the man I have believed to be only my uncle? Is this why he took me, and is this why he has been so cruel? Did he take me because he felt he must? Leonidas, you cannot tell how this awful thought has harrowed my heart. The child of Gabriel Arnold! He was never married. O, it cannot be."

"Isabel, should I believe it all to be true, it would not change my love for you. I know, dearest Isa-

bel, what I ask, and I mean it with all my heart. Will you tell me that you will be mine?"

"Leonidas, Leonidas," cried Isabel in the climax of her struggle, "I—I—, well—"

"Make me happy," pleaded Leonidas. "Let yourself be happy. Speak, dearest."

"I am yours, Leonidas," she breathed faintly. "I will be yours forever."

"I am happy, Isabel. I shall always remember this moment, for you have promised to be mine forever."

Leonidas placed his arm about Isabel's shoulders, drawing her to his side. She leaned against him with her head resting on his breast. She looked up into his face; her lips trembled; her bosom heaved; the tears gathered in her eyes. She made an effort to speak, but words failed her in this moment of transcendent happiness.

"What is it, Isabel? Can't you tell me? You are not sad now, are you—not as you were when the red-bird played across the path, yonder?"

"I'm happy, now," replied Isabel, softly. "In spite of it all, Leonidas, I am happy."

"Isabel! Isabel!"

Just as the half-spent moon peeped up from behind the pines Dr. Demster drove up to the stile¹ in front of the Arnold homestead, accompanied by the Rev. Vernon Eskridge. It was he who had discoursed upon the Beatitudes, and who, without knowing it, had changed the current of Leonidas

¹The stile, the sycamores and many other landmarks have long since disappeared from Briarcrest.

Darwood's life. It was fitting that he should be present now.

As the minister and the doctor alighted a man stepped down from the veranda, and with long strides disappeared around the corner of the house.

"Did you see that man?" asked the minister. "He has on a uniform. I presume he is a Confederate officer. He is one of the guests, I suppose."

"No, he is not a guest. He is an intruder," said the doctor, "and his presence about here means no good, I fear. He has been a great annoyance to young Darwood, and I am sorry he has turned up at this time."

"Do you anticipate trouble?" asked the minister.

The doctor's manner indicated a desire to dismiss the subject, so the two men passed quietly into the house. Besides Dr. Demster, the minister, Leonidas and Isabel, none was present except Ezra and Aunt Dinah. It was the wish of both Isabel and Leonidas that only their nearest and tried friends should witness the ceremony.

As the parson read from his book, "If any can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak," a sound was heard from the veranda. The front door opened and footsteps were heard shuffling down the hall. There was a pause in the reading, as a sad-faced man, bent with the weight of years, came into the room. He moved to where the company stood, but then remained as motionless as a statue for a moment, eyeing the two young people as they stood before the minister. The silence at last became op-

pressive. Leonidas began to show signs of anxiety, for he anticipated some inopportune scene. Isabel gazed in wonder at the aged stranger. She had never seen him before, but she trembled as she observed his peculiar expression. She turned toward Leonidas, grasping him tightly by the arm, and looking anxiously into his face asked "Who is it? and what is he here for?"

"I approve of it," said the old man, with a shaking voice. "Before God, I give my approval. I have been wrong. My son has been right. I have repented in bitter tears. I have been both foolish and uncharitable. O, forgive me!" The old man placed his hands upon the young couple's heads, and looking intently at Isabel, he said: "From henceforth you are my daughter. Forgive me for a great wrong. How wicked I was to resort to a villainous slander, and impugn your good name to cause my son to hate you! It was a lie. I knew it at the time. Forgive me for what I have done."

Then he fell on Leonidas's neck and sobbed aloud: "How unjust I have been! O, to what depths of sin my prejudices have led! Forgive me for the evil I did. I have repented. Forgive a wicked and prejudiced old man. Leonidas, my son, your faith is now mine, and shall be forever. You must bring your wife home to see mother, without delay."

EPILOGUE

IN less than a fortnight after the wedding at Briarcrest, Leonidas and Isabel called at the home of the French Count's wife. They related the facts concerning the murder of her husband, and gave her the medal and the paper containing the Count's private instructions from Napoleon III. The poor woman expressed her gratitude for the sad news, as it was a relief to know the worst and to have suspense ended.

Nothing was ever positively known concerning the disposition of the Count's body. In 1869 the bones of a man were accidentally discovered in a stone culvert that received the water from the branch that ran through Arnold's farm and emptied into the Elizabeth river. The skeleton was supposed to be that of the French nobleman. Leonidas Darwood had little doubt as to its identity when he observed that the skull was fractured in two places.

Concerning Captain Vantine it is sufficient to say that when he strode away from the veranda at Briarcrest and disappeared around the corner of the house he realized that all hope of gaining the love of Isabel Proctor was gone; for he now knew she was about to become the wife of his rival. He lost all interest in life and became reckless and despondent. In General Pickett's charge at Gettysburg he was among the first to reach the stone

fence, and cheered lustily when the Confederate flag was placed upon the rampart. He was in the midst of the bloody onslaught in the Wilderness and at Cold Harbor, and at the battle of the Crater his daring deeds were the subject of much comment. When the cause of the South was acknowledged to be lost, and General Lee laid aside his sword at Appomattox, Captain Vantine was one of the last to admit defeat.

Jack Mobaly was never apprehended and he was not seen in the vicinity of Deep Creek again, though at times his name was connected with desperate deeds done in the neighborhood of the Great Dismal Swamp.



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